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THE STUDY OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE



# THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

SAMUEL P. COWARDIN, JR.

AND

PAUL ELMER MORE

*Second Edition*



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## PREFACE

This book is intended for use in classes pursuing the systematic study of English literature. It may also be used profitably by readers who wish to pursue a less formal study of the subject.

The exercises have been designed to make the reader think about literary problems and "get the meaning from the printed page." The teacher can base additional exercises on the numerous poems and prose excerpts quoted in the text.

The authors believe that matters of literary criticism will be of greater interest to young men and women if the abstruse problems involved are simplified and illustrated in such a way as to lessen the difficulty. They have tried to present these problems clearly. They trust that in the hands of competent teachers this book will cause students to view literature in a new light; they also hope that for many who are adventuring into the wide field of literary studies without the aid of a teacher it will be a friendly and useful guide.

To Mr. Douglas A. Shepardson and Mr. Dudley Fitts of the Choate School, to Professor John Webster Spargo of Northwestern University, and to Ruth Brown Cowardin the authors are indebted for helpful criticisms and suggestions; to Professor Charles Hodge Jones, formerly of Princeton University, and Mrs. Jones for assistance in reading the proof.

S. P. C., Jr.  
P. E. M.



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THE STUDY OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE



## CHAPTER I

### WHAT IS LITERATURE?

ANY student of Latin will see at once that the word *literature* embodies the idea of *things written*. Taken in its broadest meaning, literature represents the sum total of all that has ever been written. In a more re-

stricted sense, it may signify the general  
**Special** body of writings on some particular subject.  
**Meanings.**

For example, if we were asked to write a paper on television, we should first go to a library and look up "the literature on the subject." In other words, our first step would be to examine what books and articles we could find dealing with television. And in a still more restricted sense, the word is often used to indicate the written materials put out to advertise special products. If we are interested in a certain make of automobile, the manufacturer will be quick to send us his "literature."

But the term is still again employed to designate certain writings which are neither technical treatises nor advertisements but have in common definite characteristics that set them apart from writings in general. This is the ordinary and familiar use of the word *literature*, and it is the only one with

**The Usual**  
**Meaning.**

which we are concerned here. When used in this way, *literature* is a word very difficult to define, if, indeed, any brief, simple definition can be given at all. That difficulty, however, need cause

us no worry; for we can agree on most of the peculiar characteristics which distinguish books that are literary from those that are not, and we can thus form a sufficiently satisfactory idea of what literature is. Among the writings usually accepted as works of literature are *Macbeth*, "Lycidas," and the Bible. They are typical of the whole class of writings to which they belong; therefore any definite characteristics which they possess in common will be common to the entire class, and consequently will be distinguishing characteristics of literature. For that reason, let us examine *Macbeth*, "Lycidas," and the Bible and see what similar qualities appear in all three.

Certainly it will be admitted that all three challenge us to think. In *Macbeth* we find constant stimulus to thought. For one thing, we are made to think about base ambition and its consequences. *Macbeth* says:

The  
Power to  
Stimulate  
Thought.

I have no spur  
To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself  
And falls on the other.

Likewise there are many things in "Lycidas" which cause us to think. Has it ever occurred to us that we should like to be famous? Then have we asked ourselves what fame really is, and what it is worth, and what it costs? Do we agree with Milton? This is what he says:

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
(That last infirmity of noble mind)  
To scorn delights and live laborious days;  
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,

And think to burst out into sudden blaze,  
Comes the blind fury with the abhorrèd shears,  
And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"  
Phoebus replied, and touched my trembling ears;  
"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,  
Nor in the glistening foil  
Set off to the world, nor in broad rumor lies,  
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes  
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;  
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,  
Of so much fame in Heaven expect thy meed."

In the case of the Bible it seems almost superfluous to cite an illustrative passage. That book has provoked more thinking than anything else ever written. However, let us look for a moment at this:

Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.

And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.

Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

We cannot read that last verse and not think. It compels us to think.

Moreover, the passages just quoted cause us not merely to think. A problem in algebra can do that. They make us think about life. Ambition led Napoleon to subdue Europe, but what of the suffering and ruin which he brought to thousands and thousands? And

Thought About Life.	he himself, the conqueror, did he not die in exile on the lonely island of St. Helena?
---------------------------	--

Then there was fame. How often fame comes to men only after death! Today the world gives the poet, Keats, full recognition; but the man, Keats, died with no assurance that his fame should live after him.<sup>1</sup> And the mention of the tribute money reminds us that we have some very sacred obligations to meet in addition to such things as the payment of worldly taxes. But all this is intimately connected with life. Such a connection is what Matthew Arnold had in mind when he said that poetry is a "criticism of life" and is what we are thinking about when we use the trite expression "human interest." We see, then, that the three works which we have chosen as representative have in common the *power to make us think about life*.

Now each of the passages already examined also stirs our emotions. We are won to sympathy for Macbeth when we hear him closing his great soliloquy in a hopeless struggle against temptation, arguing with himself against the murder of Duncan. We are touched by sadness when Milton brings home to us the uncertainty

<sup>1</sup> Keats once said, "I think I shall be among the English poets after my death." However, in the gloomy days before his death he seemed less certain; and on his tomb we can read what he wished to be inscribed about himself: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water."

of earthly recompense; then in turn we are reassured when, in the words of Phoebus, he suggests a higher reward. We know the thrill of triumph when we perceive the devastating finality of Christ's retort to those who sought to trap him. But let us search further.

The Power  
to Arouse  
Emotion.

Macbeth has killed Duncan, and suddenly his overwrought mind begins to recognize the atrocity of his crime. He says to Lady Macbeth:

Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!  
Macbeth doth murder sleep"—the innocent sleep,  
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

Then, as if wishing to calm him, Lady Macbeth asks the matter-of-fact question:

What do you mean?

But Macbeth cannot stop. Utterly disregarding her, he keeps straight ahead:

Still it cried, "Sleep no more!" to all the house:  
"Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor  
Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more."

Can we fail to be moved by the plight of this man, who is stunned by the horrible realization that he will never enjoy the sleep of innocence again? Or let us turn a second time to "Lycidas." The poem has passed its peak of sorrow. Serenity comes back with peace after pain:

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,  
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,

Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor.  
So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore,  
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:  
So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,  
Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves,  
Where, other groves and other streams along,  
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,  
And hears the unexpressive <sup>2</sup> nuptial song,  
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
There entertain him all the Saints above,  
In solemn troops, and sweet societies,  
That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
And wipe the tears forever from his eyes.

Those noble words make us instantly conscious of an emotion similar to that aroused by the simple prose of the Bible:

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

And what we here find true in the case of these selections we shall find equally true when we study in its entirety each of the works from which they have been taken. Thus we see that the selected works here under consideration also have in common the *power to stir our emotions*.

Again, if we look back at the first passage quoted from *Macbeth*—the passage about ambition—we shall notice that Shakespeare uses the word *spur*. This word leads us to think of a horse. We also probably think of a balking horse, which has to be spurred to make him

<sup>2</sup> Inexpressible.



move. Such a picture is in absolute harmony with the situation Shakespeare is describing. Macbeth's intent to kill Duncan was very much like a balking horse. In fact, the spurring of ambition would most likely never have set this intent in motion had there not been a great deal of urging and coaxing on the part of Lady Macbeth. But Shakespeare did not mention any horse; he simply employed a word which made us imagine all this. The word *spur* is likewise present in what Milton said about fame, where once more we are invited to use our imagination. And the word *Caesar* in the passage about the tribute money causes us to think about more than the Roman Emperor, Tiberius, to whom Christ was alluding. It brings back what we have read about Rome's great general, Julius Caesar. We remember his conquests in Gaul, his laconic message to the Roman senate, and the dying words with which he reproached Brutus. Then we recall that his name became synonymous with the title *emperor*, and our thoughts turn to the imperial city on the Tiber and the vast empire which it dominated. Thus we find that even single words properly used set the imagination working. Groups of words can do the same thing, and we shall not have to read far in *Macbeth*, "Lycidas," and the Bible to discover that they are full of words and passages which make the mind's eye see pictures; consequently every one will agree that these three works of literature have another common characteristic—*the power to kindle the imagination*.

As we remember, we chose *Macbeth*, "Lycidas," and the Bible because they typify that special class of writ-

The Power  
to Kindle  
the Imagi-  
nation.

ings which we usually have in view when we use the term *literature*; and we agreed that any definite qualities which they could be found to possess in common would be distinguishing characteristics of literature. Having discovered three important qualities conspicuously present in all three of our chosen exemplars, we could now describe literature as the body of writings which possess those qualities. However, such a description would be too broad. Many things which most frequently are not thought of as literature could meet our requirements. For example, the newspaper account of an accident may lead us to think about the uncertainty of human life; it may move us to pity for the victims; it may cause us to visualize the scene. Broadly speaking, we may call such an account literature of a kind; but, as a rule, people are thinking of something very different when they speak of literature, and for that reason we must seek some additional means of limitation. Let us go back once more to our three typical representatives.

*Macbeth* was written sometime between 1603 and 1610; "Lycidas" dates back to 1637; and the King James Version of the Bible, the version from which our Bible illustrations were drawn, was published in 1611. All, as we observe, are more than three hundred years old. They have been read widely for more than three centuries, and they continue to be read today. On the other hand, most of the material found in the columns of the daily newspapers is displaced and forgotten within a few hours after it has appeared. Therefore we see that writings vary greatly in their power to survive. At the one end

Three  
Character-  
istics of  
Literature.

The Power  
to Survive.

of the scale we have what we may call ephemeral literature, which is read and quickly passed by; at the other end we have great literature, which outlives generations of readers. Between the two extremes we find all kinds of variations in quality and in ability to endure. And what we have just noted points the way to our final limitation. Although we cannot prescribe the exact amount of power to survive which a given piece of writing must have before we admit it into the category of what is usually considered literature, we can at least exclude the ephemeral. In other words, we can safely affirm that in its most frequently accepted meaning the term *literature* applies only to those writings which have at least some *power to survive*. In the case of contemporary productions which have not yet had time to prove themselves we shall, of course, meet with difficulty; for we cannot look into the future and see just what their fate will be. For that reason we shall never be able to pronounce upon contemporary works with the same confidence with which we can judge the masterpieces of the past. Nevertheless, we know that some such productions will almost certainly live; and there are ways by which in most instances we can roughly estimate the probability of survival. That matter will be discussed later; at present we can simply assert that the limitation must hold good for all writings old or new.

As we recognized at the outset, *literature* is a term very difficult to define, if any brief, simple definition of it can be given at all. We can, however, form a sufficiently good idea of what the word is generally taken to mean and of what

it will mean when used in this book if we keep before us those distinguishing characteristics which we have just noted. And we may now generalize as follows:

*Ordinarily the word "literature" stands not for the sum total of all that has been written, not for the body of technical treatises on some special subject, and not for advertisements or sales propaganda; but for such writings as have the power to stimulate thought about life, the power to stir the emotions, the power to kindle the imagination, and, to some extent at least, the power to survive.*

### QUESTIONS

1. What does the word *literature* mean when used in the broadest possible sense? 2. What meanings of the word have no place in our present study? 3. What are the chief distinguishing characteristics of those writings which we look upon as literature? 4. Why are ordinary newspaper articles usually not considered works of literature?

### EXERCISES

1. Select some poem, play, or novel from the works of literature which you have read and see whether you can show that it possesses the characteristics which we have attributed to literature. Do they all seem equally prominent? If not, list them according to their relative prominence.

2. A textbook of geometry undoubtedly stimulates thought. It may also kindle the imagination in a way, for we often attack an "original" by first imagining the problem proved. Again, it stirs the emotions to a certain extent. This is indicated by the fact that some of us like geometry; whereas others do not. Finally, it may have some power to survive, for a good textbook in geometry may remain in use

a number of years. All those things being true, is a textbook of geometry a work of literature? If not, why not?

3. Read carefully the following passage:

To define in literature is practically little more than to give a nickname. Only in the exact sciences can we have absolute definitions, because here the definition can be comprehensive. But literature is a living organism; books are as hard to be known as persons and any definition of a living organism must always be based on subjective impressions, on opinions and feelings.<sup>3</sup>

State briefly in your own words the meaning of this passage. Take some such literary term as *poetry* and try to define it. Do you now find that what the passage says is true?

4. Professor W. P. Trent quotes the following words from John Morley and says that they offer too narrow a definition of literature:

Literature consists of all the books—and they are not so many—where moral truth and human passion are touched with a certain largeness, severity, and attractiveness of form.<sup>4</sup>

Do you agree with Professor Trent? If so, in what respect do you find the definition too narrow? Can you think of some works which, in your opinion, belong to literature and would be excluded by such a definition as this? Why would they be excluded?

5. Here is another definition:

Literature is the Written Expression of Thought, through Imagination, Feelings and Taste, in such an untechnical form as to make it intelligible and interesting to the general mind.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Harko G. de Maar, *A History of Modern English Romanticism*. London, 1924, I, 4. By permission of and special arrangement with the Oxford University Press.

<sup>4</sup> *The Authority of Criticism and Other Essays*. New York (Charles Scribner's Sons), 1899, p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> Theodore W. Hunt, *Literature, Its Principles and Problems*. New York and London (Funk & Wagnalls), 1906, p. 24.

To what extent do you agree with this definition? Can you find any fault with it? Is it less narrow than the preceding one? What, do you think, is meant by the word *taste*? Do you get a clear idea of what the writer means by "Expression of Thought, through Imagination, Feelings and Taste"?

6. Read with great care the following excerpt from Thomas De Quincey's "Essay on Pope":

. . . There is, first, the literature of *knowledge*, and, secondly, the literature of *power*. The function of the first is—to *teach*; the function of the second is—to *move*: the first is a rudder, the second an oar or a sail. The first speaks to the *mere* discursive understanding; the second speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding or reason, but always *through* affections of pleasure and sympathy. Remotely, it may travel toward an object seated in what Lord Bacon calls "dry light"; but proximately it does and must operate—else it ceases to be a literature of *power*—on and through that *humid* light which clothes itself in the mists and glittering *iris* of human passions, desires, and genial emotions.

What do you learn from *Paradise Lost*? Nothing at all. What do you learn from a cookery book? Something new, something that you did not know before, in every paragraph. But would you therefore put the wretched cookery book on a higher level of estimation than the divine poem? What you owe to Milton is not any knowledge, of which a million separate items are still but a million of advancing steps on the same earthly level; what you owe is *power*—that is, exercise and expansion to your own latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite, where every pulse and each separate influx is a step upward, a step ascending as upon a Jacob's ladder from earth to mysterious altitudes above the earth. All the steps of knowledge, from first to last, carry you further on the same plane, but could never raise you one foot above your ancient level of earth; whereas the very first step in *power* is a flight—is an ascending movement into another element where earth is forgotten.

Summarize briefly in your own words the gist of what De Quincey says. Could De Quincey's "cookery book" be listed

under the head of technical treatises such as we have excluded from consideration? Does De Quincey's use of the words *flight* and *ascending movement* suggest activity of the imagination and emotions? Does De Quincey's conception of the "literature of power" accord with what we mean in this book when we use the word *literature*? Do you agree with what De Quincey says about *Paradise Lost*? Do you think that there are books which could illustrate at the same time both the "literature of knowledge" and the "literature of power"? Can you name any?

## CHAPTER II

### CHOOSING GOOD BOOKS

**T**HE conclusions we have just drawn show us that in its usually accepted meaning literature is a very comprehensive term. Even after we have debarred all that is ephemeral, we are forced to include a vast number of writings greatly dissimilar in quality and value. Since we can never read all of them, we naturally wish to choose those which will give us the greatest benefit and pleasure. Where we are free to make a selection, probably our first impulse is to pick the best. However, if we attempt to follow that impulse in selecting books, we are immediately confronted by problems. For one thing, how are we to know what works of literature are the best? And again, granting that the best books will afford us the most profitable reading, can we be sure that they will give us the greatest pleasure? Let us seek answers to those two questions.

In the long ago our remote ancestors prized old swords, gave them names, and handed them down to their children. They did not hang them on the walls simply for ornaments as we hang old flintlocks over the mantelpiece; they used those swords constantly in battle. We would not use an old flintlock in a fight; we could not trust such a weapon. But with swords the case was different. In the olden times, the working of iron and the tempering

The  
Problem  
of Choice.

Books  
and Old  
Swords.



of steel was a rather uncertain business. If a smith made a dozen swords, let us say, some would prove defective in the first test; others would last for a while, yet would break finally under rough service and be thrown away. But one, perhaps, out of the dozen would not break, would survive a hundred hard-fought encounters, would become an old sword. The fact that it was old would prove that it had not been broken, and the fact that it had not been broken would prove that it was a good sword.<sup>1</sup>

By agreeing that a work of literature must have at least some power to survive, we ruled all ephemeral writings out of consideration. Such writings are like the swords which came glittering and fair from the hands of the smith only to be splintered at the first blow. But we need not stop there; the parallel between books and swords can be traced further. The stacks in our libraries are loaded with many dusty volumes which only scholars and antiquaries ever peruse. Though they may once have enjoyed a considerable reputation, they could not hold the interest of the ages. They may be compared to the swords which served for a time, yet could not weather the fury of repeated combats. And still further the parallel runs true. There are literary works which have outlived the passing of empires and the crumbling of civilizations. We may liken those to the old swords which did not break.

<sup>1</sup> For references to old swords in *Browulf*, see lines 1457, 1488, and 2680. For the breaking of a sword at the first blow see the *Volsunga Saga*, tr. William Morris, ch. 15. For a popular account of swords and their names, see F. P. Verney, "Mythical and Medieval Swords," *Contemporary Review*, XXXVIII (1860), pp. 595 ff.

Foremost among those noble writings which have been read for centuries and still continue to be read stand the two Greek epics often called the Homeric poems because tradition ascribes them to Homer. Professor Palmer in the introduction to his translation of the *Odyssey* says this about them:

Example  
of the  
Greek  
Epics.

When the poems of Homer were written, no man knows. We shall not be far wrong if we say they came into being a thousand years before the Christian era, or about as early as we find the Greek race. At the dawn of authentic history portions of them were chanted about the cities of the Greek mainland, southern Italy, Sicily, the islands of the Aegean, and the coast of Asia Minor. Throughout the continuance of Greek civilization they were the chief ingredient in the education of the young and the chief literary delight of the men of mature years.<sup>2</sup>

This not only makes us realize the antiquity of the Homeric poems, but it also reminds us of their tremendous significance in the intellectual life of the Greeks. Besides, we know that the decadence of Greek civilization did not bring an end to their popularity or their influence. They won and held the admiration of the Romans. During the Middle Ages they continued actively alive in the East, and even in western Europe, where the Greek language became almost unknown, they were not entirely forgotten. When the Renaissance brought back the knowledge of Greek to the western European countries, the Homeric epics began to be printed, and soon they were being translated into

<sup>2</sup> *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated by George Herbert Palmer (Houghton Mifflin Company).

many languages. From that time on, editions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, both in the original and in translation, have appeared in great numbers; and Homer has continued to exert a widespread influence upon literature.<sup>3</sup>

The *Aeneid* of Virgil provides us with another capital illustration of how certain writings manage to survive. Written in the first century before Christ, the *Aeneid* immediately took a commanding position in the field of poetry. The transmission of Virgil through the Middle Ages did not meet with the obstacle which confronted the transmission of Homer. As we have seen, knowledge of Greek was almost lost in western Europe, but the fortune of Latin was different. As the language of the Church and of learning, Latin stood its ground; therefore the *Aeneid* remained accessible. So great was the influence of Virgil that many regarded him as the supreme poet. Even among the illiterate and grossly superstitious his fame spread until, transformed into a magician, he became the hero of numerous popular tales.<sup>4</sup> From that time down to the present day Virgil's popularity has continued, and it shows no sign of waning. The two thousandth anniversary of his birth was celebrated with enthusiasm throughout the civilized world. And this enthusiasm for Virgil is due chiefly to the *Aeneid*, his most

<sup>3</sup> For a good brief discussion of the transmission of Homer, see H. W. Smythe, "Epic Poetry," in *Greek Literature*. New York, 1912, pp. 34 ff. For a list of English translations, covering six and a half pages, see J. N. Douglas Bush, "English Translations of Homer," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, XLI (June, 1926), pp. 335 ff.

<sup>4</sup> For an extended treatment of this interesting subject, see D. Comparetti, *Virgil in the Middle Ages*, London, 1895.

widely known work and his greatest. For about twenty centuries the *Aeneid* has continued to be read. That it has appealed to English-speaking people is proved by the frequency with which it has been translated into our tongue. These words of Professor Osgood's tell a story:

No foreign literary language more stubbornly resists a successful rendering in English than does Latin. And yet there have been more than twenty English versions of the major works of Virgil, besides twenty-five of the *Aeneid* alone, and some one hundred and four versions of considerable portions of his entire works.<sup>5</sup>

Although there is nothing in English which can match the Homeric poems or the *Aeneid* in age, the fact that some works continue alive while others are forgotten is as true of English literature as it is of the Greek or the Latin. Whereas many writers of a few decades ago are now mere names, it may be said without hesitation that Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, written in the fourteenth century, are today known to more readers than ever before. And that is true despite those changes in our language which make Chaucer difficult reading for the ordinary man. And more than three hundred years have slipped away since Shakespeare put aside his pen—a short time indeed when we recall the antiquity of Homer, but withal a stern enough test. Yet to say that Shakespeare's works still live is but to state a truism, which requires no proof.

<sup>5</sup> *The Tradition of Virgil: Three Papers on the History and Influence of the Poet.* By Junius S. Morgan, Kenneth McKenzie, and Charles G. Osgood. Princeton (Princeton University Press), 1930, p. 25.

The history of such works as the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, the *Canterbury Tales*, and the plays of Shakespeare shows that there are writings which can withstand the attrition of time. They are literature's old swords—the swords that do not break. And now we are ready to complete our parallel. If the swords which remained unbroken and usable were the good swords, can we not argue by analogy that the books which continue to be read for years and even for centuries are the good books?

But we must not stop with this argument. The selection of good books is a matter of immense importance; and before we can approach our problem of choice in its larger aspects, it is essential that we have at least some books of which we can be absolutely sure.

Let us apply another test. Valuations rest largely on comparisons. The man who has known and used a great number of swords is certainly a better judge of them than most of us, simply because he can compare each with others good or bad. Similarly, a man who has read great numbers of books ought to be a better judge of books than the ordinary reader. Therefore let us turn to a few men conspicuous for their knowledge of literature and see what they have to say about those works which we have just been considering—works which we called good because they were able to survive. In this way we can test the validity of our conclusions.

Few men of recent times have equaled Andrew Lang in the range of their interests or the extent of their knowledge:

It has been said that Andrew Lang, the most versatile and one of the ablest writers of his day, wrote upon so many subjects that he could scarcely miss writing well on something. He was journalist, historian, anthropologist, philologist, translator, critic, and poet; he wrote upon such diverse subjects as Mary Queen of Scots and the customs of savage races, The Man in the Iron Mask and Theocritus, French romances and primitive magic, Burns and totems, Homer, dreams, ghosts, and fairy-tales.<sup>6</sup>

Such a man could not have written well in so many fields without having a wide acquaintance with books; consequently his estimation of any work of literature must have some weight. This is what the *Odyssey* inspired him to write:

As one that for a weary space has lain  
 Lulled by the song of Circe and her wine  
 In gardens near the pale of Proserpine  
 Where that Aegean Isle forgets the main,  
 And only the low lutes of love complain,  
 And only shadows of wan lovers pine,  
 As such an one were glad to know the brine  
 Salt on his lips, and the large air again,  
 So gladly, from the songs of modern speech  
 Men turn, and see the stars, and feel the free  
 Shrill wind beyond the close of heavy flowers,  
 And through the music of the languid hours,  
 They hear like ocean on a western beach  
 The surge and thunder of the *Odyssey*.<sup>7</sup>

In this fine sonnet by one who knew both the old poetry and the "songs of modern speech" we see a whole-

<sup>6</sup> Gayley, Young, and Kurtz, *English Poetry Its Principles and Progress*, p. 459. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers, New York, 1930.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Lang, *Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 7. By permission of and special arrangement with Longmans, Green and Co.

hearted admiration for the *Odyssey*. And we see that Andrew Lang esteems the work of Homer not because it is old but because it can reach out across some three thousand years to call us away from what is trivial and insipid and to fill us with a zest for the bigness, the freedom, and the sanity of life. Time is the test of such qualities, not the maker of them.

But Andrew Lang had one very great advantage over most of us. He could read Homer in the original Greek. John Keats, however, could not. When he was only twenty years old, he knew enough about literature to make his opinions merit respect; yet he had not read Homer. But though he was introduced to the Greek epics through Chapman's rather crabbed translation, he felt, as he tells us, the joy of one who has made a great discovery, and at the age of twenty he was inspired to write this sonnet:

Keats's  
Tribute.

Much have I, traveled in the realms of gold,  
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen:  
Round many western islands have I been  
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
Oft of one broad expanse had I been told  
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne:  
Yet never did I breathe its pure serene  
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:  
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken;  
Or like stout Cortes, when with eagle eyes  
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men  
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—  
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

For an opinion concerning Virgil, let us go to Alfred Tennyson. Having devoted his long life to writing and study, and having achieved greatness for himself as a poet, Tennyson was certainly better qualified than most men to be a safe judge of poets and poetry. He has left us one of the most impressive tributes ever paid to Virgil:

Tennyson's  
Praise of  
Virgil.

Roman Virgil, thou that singest  
 Ilion's lofty temples robed in fire,  
 Ilion falling, Rome arising,  
 wars, and filial faith and Dido's pyre;

Landscape-lover, lord of language  
 more than he that sang the "Works and Days,"  
 All the chosen coin of fancy  
 flashing out from many a golden phrase;

Thou that singest wheat and woodland,  
 tilth and vineyard, hive and horse and herd;  
 All the charm of all the Muses  
 often flowering in a lonely word;

Poet of the happy Tityrus  
 piping underneath his beechen bowers;  
 Poet of the poet-satyr  
 whom the laughing shepherd bound with flowers;

Chanter of the Pollio, glorying  
 in the blissful years again to be,  
 Summers of the snakeless meadow,  
 unlaborious earth and oarless sea;

Thou that seest Universal  
 Nature moved by Universal Mind;  
 Thou majestic in thy sadness  
 at the doubtful doom of human kind;



Light among the vanished ages;  
    star that gildest yet this phantom shore;  
Golden branch amid the shadows,  
    kings and realms that pass to rise no more;

Now thy Forum roars no longer,  
    fallen every purple Caesar's dome—  
Tho' thine ocean-roll of rhythm  
    sound forever of imperial Rome—

Now the Rome of slaves hath perished,  
    and the Rome of freemen holds her place,  
I, from out the Northern Island  
    sundered once from all the human race,

I salute thee, Mantovano,  
    I that loved thee since my days began,  
Wielder of the stateliest measure  
    ever molded by the lips of man.

Of late years there has been a marked quickening of interest in Chaucer. Some of our best scholars have devoted much of their time to Chaucerian studies. But for fear that they may be prejudiced in favor of the fourteenth-century poet, let us pass them by and seek an estimation of Chaucer elsewhere. Certainly James Russell Lowell cannot be accused of narrowness in his literary interests; and after he had read extensively and given much thought to the relative merit of literary works, he wrote this about Chaucer:

Lowell's  
Opinion of  
Chaucer.

It is good to retreat now and then beyond earshot of the introspective confidences of modern literature, and to lose ourselves in the gracious wordliness of Chaucer. Here was a healthy and hearty man, so genuine that we need not ask

whether he was genuine or no, so sincere as quite to forget his own sincerity, so truly pious that he could be happy in the best world that God chose to make, so humane that he loved even the foibles of his kind. Here was a truly epic poet, without knowing it, who did not waste time in considering whether his age was good or bad, but, quietly taking it for granted as the best that ever was or could be for *him*, has left us such a picture of contemporary life as no man ever painted.<sup>8</sup>

Many are the eulogies of Shakespeare which have followed Ben Jonson's famous tribute in persistently swift succession. One of them deserves to be better known. It came from the pen of George Gissing, a man who read books and loved them:

Gissing's  
Eulogy of  
Shakespeare.

Among the many reasons which make me glad to have been born in England, one of the first is that I read Shakespeare in my mother tongue. If I try to imagine myself as one who cannot know him face to face, who hears him only speaking from afar, and that in accents which only through the laboring intelligence can touch the living soul, there comes upon me a sense of chill discouragement, of dreary deprivation. I am wont to think that I can read Homer, and, assuredly, if any man enjoys him, it is I; but can I for a moment dream that Homer yields me all his music, that his word is to me as to him who walked by the Hellenic shore when Hellas lived? I know that there reaches me across the vast of time no more than a faint and broken echo; I know that it would be fainter still, but for its blending with those memories of youth which are as a glimmer of the world's primeval glory. Let every land have joy of its poet; for the

<sup>8</sup> From Lowell's essay on Chaucer. See *The Works of James Russell Lowell*. (Houghton Mifflin Company), III, 293.

poet is the land itself, all its greatness and its sweetness, all that incommunicable heritage for which men live and die. As I close the book, love and reverence possess me. Whether does my full heart turn to the great Enchanter, or to the Island upon which he has laid his spell? I know not. I cannot think of them apart. In the love and reverence awakened by that voice of voices, Shakespeare and England are but one.<sup>9</sup>

These opinions are typical of what competent judges almost without exception would say concerning the Homeric poems, the *Aeneid*, the *Canterbury Tales*, and the plays of Shakespeare. Thus we see that the verdict of people whose extensive reading has qualified them to select good books by the method of comparison falls in line with the conclusions we have already drawn from the analogy of the swords. But the works here cited are representative of many others in prose as well as poetry which have also stood the test of time and won their own measure of approval. At this point it would be indeed delightful to pause and make a long inventory of other great writings which as truly as those we have taken for examples belong to our literary heritage. That, unfortunately, we cannot do; nevertheless, the titles of such works are familiar to us. Those are the writings which we study as literature in our schools and colleges. And besides, they are readily accessible in numerous good collections.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. New York (E. P. Dutton and Company), p. 143.

<sup>10</sup> For example, there is Dr. Eliot's *Five Foot Book Shelf*. Another good collection is *The Columbia University Course in Literature*, published by the Columbia University Press.

We have now been able to determine which of the older literary works are the good ones, but what are we to do in the case of recent books—the yet untested swords? One thought immediately presents itself: perhaps what we have learned about the older writings will in some way help us to judge of the new. Unquestionably it will, though we must exercise caution. The good books of the past cannot be used as an *absolute* criterion. In other words, they provide us with no fixed units of measurement which we can apply to contemporary books. The method of the yardstick cannot be employed in estimating literary values. What those writings can do, however, is to assist us indirectly.

Judging  
New Books.

For one thing, the history of literature shows conclusively that works which deal with matters of transitory interest, unless they connect that interest in some way with universal aspects of life, are almost certain to perish. Those which have the greatest power to live deal with themes of universal and perennial interest. Of that fact Professor Lowes has given us an admirable illustration:

Themes of  
Universal  
Interest.

What Thales and the Seven Sages thought and wrote is matter of historical interest merely. Sappho is contemporary with Rupert Brooke. William Mason's "Ode to Mr. Pinchbeck on his newly invented patent Candle Snuffers," published in the notable year of the Declaration of Independence, is now introduced to you, I suspect, for the first time. It has followed its patent candle snuffers to oblivion. The contemporary "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" you know by heart; its theme is death, and death knows no oblivion.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> J. L. Lowes, *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*. Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1919, p. 296.

By some resource of genius William Mason might possibly have brought his poem into such close relation to the universal interests of mankind that it could still command our attention. That, however, he did not succeed in doing. But Thomas Gray, taking a commonplace theme of never ending significance and treating it so as to awaken our appreciation of beauty, achieved an enduring masterpiece. And that same theme coupled with another which has universal appeal—the theme of human friendship—was used by the Greek poet, Callimachus, centuries before Gray was born. Made available to us in William Cory's exquisite translation, it can still lay its warm fingers upon our hearts:

They told me, Heracleitus, they told me you were dead,  
They brought me bitter news to hear and bitter tears to shed.  
I wept, as I remembered, how often you and I  
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.  
And now that thou art lying, my dear old Carian guest,  
A handful of gray ashes, long long ago at rest,  
Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales awake;  
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take.<sup>12</sup>

Unless the future brings a complete change in human nature, the books which have to do with the lasting interests of mankind will continue to be the books most likely to survive, and conversely, those concerned with matters of temporary interest will be the ones most likely to perish. Consequently we can say that any new book of the first kind mentioned is a better book than one of the second kind. We are brought to this con-

<sup>12</sup> William Cory, *Ionica*. London and Orfington (George Allen), 1891, p. 7.

clusion by our knowledge of the older writings and their history. Here, then, is one way in which, without furnishing any absolute criterion, they can at least help us indirectly.

When we said that writings concerned with matters of temporary interest were certain to perish, we made one important reservation; we said that they would perish unless their themes were in some way connected with universal aspects of life. As a matter of fact, such themes as death, love, and friendship arouse perennial interest because they are inextricably associated with universal emotions. Now if a work of literature deals with a theme which normally attracts no wide or lasting interest but brings that theme into close relation to some deep universal emotion, it may, despite its unpromising subject, have an excellent chance to endure. However, before going further into that matter, let us illustrate more fully what is meant by universal emotions.

In all the restless and interminable flux of changing customs, tastes, and beliefs, men of all times and places seem to have a common susceptibility to a few primary emotions which have defied change. Let us consider a specific example. Closely allied to the emotion stirred by the thought of death is that which is called up by realization of the transiency of all things in this world. To one who had outlived many comrades the unknown author of *Beowulf* assigned these words:

Universal  
Emotions.

None have I left to lift the sword,  
or to cleanse the carven cup of price,

beaker bright. My brave are gone,  
and the helmet hard, all haughty with gold,  
shall part from its plating. Polishers sleep  
who could brighten and burnish the battle-mask;  
and those weeds of war that were wont to brave  
over bicker of shields the bite of steel  
rust with their bearers. The ringed mail  
fares not far with famous chieftain,  
at the side of hero.<sup>13</sup>

But the emotion which burst forth in the lament of that ancient warrior was not his alone, fated to pass with his comrades and his rusted battle gear. It is a universal emotion; and in these lines of Swinburne's, written centuries later, we recognize it expressed differently, yet itself the same:

All are at one now, roses and lovers,  
Not known of the cliffs and the fields and the sea.  
Not a breath of the time that has been hovers  
In the air now soft with a summer to be.  
Not a breath shall there sweeten the seasons hereafter  
Of the flowers or the lovers that laugh now or weep,  
When as they that are free now of weeping and laughter  
We shall sleep.

Doubtless most of us would view with suspicion any piece of literature which had virtue for its theme. There has been so much dreary moralizing about virtue that some of us would probably shun a poem entitled "Virtue" as we would shun an ode voicing the praise of Mr. Pinchbeck and his patent candle snuffers. How-

<sup>13</sup> Translated by Francis B. Gummere in *The Oldest English Epic*. New York, 1909, p. 120. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

ever, what of this poem? Its theme is virtue; its title is "Virtue," and it has survived already for about three centuries:

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,  
The bridal of the earth and sky,  
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight;  
For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue, angry and brave,  
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye,  
Thy root is ever in its grave,  
And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,  
A box where sweets compacted lie,  
My music shows ye have your closes,  
And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,  
Like seasoned timber, never gives;  
But though the whole world turns to coal,  
Then chiefly lives.

George Herbert saved his poem from oblivion by bringing its theme into association with that same deep universal emotion kindled by the lines we quoted from *Beowulf*. It is the emotion awakened when we realize that all is transient except, perhaps, such things as truth and virtue. And if Herbert's lyric were a modern poem which we were reading for the first time, we could see in its appeal to this universal emotion one argument that it would live. On the other hand, we may be assured that if any writer ignores the deep emotions common to mankind and aims merely at recording some vague



mood or feeling of his own, his work is foredoomed. By teaching us these things the older writings again help us indirectly in judging newer works.

The themes of which men and women never weary are, we may be certain, always connected in some way with universal emotions. Nevertheless, the presence of

Effective Language. such a theme is not by itself assurance that a piece of writing will enjoy literary immortality or even temporary survival.

Surely if any subject can command unending interest, it is that of love. Probably nothing else in human experience has inspired so much writing, good and bad. Each year brings its crop of love verses. The magazines are kept full of them, and the number of those which fortunately never reach print is much greater. Most of them perish not because their themes lack the ability to attract interest, but because they are not presented in language that can speak to the heart. The language of literature is, therefore, as important as the theme when we come to estimate the probability of survival, for the language is the medium through which the writer's emotion is transferred to the reader. Here is a little love lyric which is deservedly popular. Yet despite its theme, and despite the fact that it connects the subject of love with the realization of transiency, it could not survive if it were ineffectively presented. It is saved by the beauty of the language in which it is written:

The night has a thousand eyes,  
And the day but one;  
Yet the light of the bright world dies  
With the dying sun.

The mind has a thousand eyes,  
And the heart but one;  
Yet the light of a whole life dies  
When love is done.<sup>14</sup>

And the gladness we feel each year when spring returns is still another of the universal emotions. So numerous are the yearly efforts to express the joy of spring in verse that we scornfully dub them "spring poems." Most of them pass as quickly as they come, because they are seldom presented in language which can make us know the same emotion which the spring-time kindled in those who wrote them. Yet the same theme properly presented can quicken the emotions of us all; the genius of a Browning can stir us with the joy of spring:

Oh, to be in England  
Now that April's there,  
And whoever wakes in England  
Sees, some morning unaware,  
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf  
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,  
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough  
In England—now!

Since the language is the medium through which a writer conveys his thought, one might at first suspect that it is really the thought which affects our emotions and not the language. Unquestionably the thought does have a part in the process, but it can easily be demonstrated that the language itself is of vital importance.

<sup>14</sup> F. W. Bourdillon, *The Night Has a Thousand Eyes and Other Poems*. Boston (Little, Brown and Company), 1900. Reprinted by permission of Little, Brown and Company.

We have already quoted what Macbeth said after the murder of Duncan. He told us of a voice which he had seemed to hear:

Still it cried, "Sleep no more!" to all the house:  
"Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor  
Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more!"

If we put the thought expressed in those lines into the simple words of everyday speech, we shall have something to this effect:

Henceforth the memory of what I have done will disturb my repose, will rob me of peaceful sleep.

The thought is the same, but the appeal to the emotions has almost, if not entirely, disappeared. Thus we see that the language of great literature has a certain potency not possessed by all language. And the same thing is true to a lesser degree of literature which is good though not great.

If we were all equally sensitive to the stimulus of words, the language of literature would present no problem. Its power would be proved by its immediate success in arousing our emotions, or disproved by its failure to arouse them. However, there are readers whom the greatest literature fails to move simply because they do not respond to the stimulus of its language. It is not the fault of the literature. An orchestra would not be to blame because a deaf man could not hear its music; nor can the language of literature be held responsible if a reader is not susceptible to the stimulus of its words. Luckily most of us can acquire such sensitiveness; or, if we already have it, we can make it

more keen. And we must have a quick responsiveness to the power of words if we are to become able to judge books.

The magic of effective language can in part be explained. For example, we have already observed how certain words possess the peculiar property of firing the imagination. We saw how the word *spur* instantly made us think of a balking horse. Similarly, in the lines just quoted, Shakespeare might have had Macbeth say that he had *driven away sleep*; the word *murthered*, however, is more powerful because it immediately reminds us of the murder of Duncan. Again, some words have musical qualities which must be taken into account. Consciously or unconsciously, Shakespeare took advantage of the musical effect produced by the vowel *o*. By repeating the words *no more*, both of which contain the most mournful-sounding vowel in English, he brought out the intensity of Macbeth's overwhelming sorrow and regret. Finally, the emphasis of language is affected by the order in which the words are arranged. Of that fact Shakespeare seems to have been instinctively aware. He made Macbeth's cry tremendously personal by referring to the three names of the one man in such a way that the most personal of the names came last—Glamis, Cawdor, Macbeth.

Nevertheless, when all is said and done, no mere study of the mechanics of expression can explain that effectiveness of language which, among other things, distinguishes good literature from bad. There is no rule by which we can identify effective language; it assumes too many different forms. Indeed, no two great writers express themselves

Taste for  
Effective  
Language.

in exactly the same way. How then can we acquire such lively sensitiveness to words that we may know the fault is with the book and not with us if it fails to stir our emotions? Here once more the great writings of the past can help us. Their language has stirred the hearts of many readers. If it does not move us likewise, we may be sure that we alone are to blame. But if we will only persist in reading the language of the old masters which we know is effective, we shall little by little acquire a taste for it; then we shall become so sensitive to the stimulus of words that we shall respond to potent language, in old books or new, whatever be the form it may assume.

We may conclude, then, *that the best of the older works of literature are those which have stood the test of time and won the acclaim of people qualified to estimate literary merit; and that the best of the new books are those which either deal with themes of perennial interest, or, at least, bring their themes into intimate association with universal aspects of life, and appeal to universal and true emotions through the medium of effective language—language which will stir us immediately if we have become sensitive to its magic by reading the masterpieces of the past.*

If we have found a satisfactory answer to the first of the two questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, it remains for us to consider the second problem:

**Pleasure from Books.** will the best books give us the greatest pleasure? In determining the relative value of works of literature, most people are willing to accept the verdict of time and the decisions of authorities; but they are likely to feel that they themselves

are the best judges of what affords them most pleasure. Undoubtedly, every reader knows best what he enjoys at a particular time or at a particular stage of his development; but often the thing which at that time and stage delights him least holds the latent power of yielding him the greatest ultimate pleasure. For instance, the student who admits that Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" may be great poems but protests that they give him no pleasure will after a little study often say of his own accord that he has changed his mind. The reason why many of us do not at once find enjoyment in reading those poems is obvious. They are filled with allusions to literature and mythology; and if a person does not understand the allusions, he gets little meaning out of the poems. Such a person is almost certain to enjoy them as soon as he comes to understand the allusions which they contain. To varying degrees the same thing is true of all great writings. Though they may not always cause us difficulty by allusions, they do in general make greater demands upon our faculties than do the ordinary books of the hour. And those who take no pleasure in reading great literature are, almost without exception, those who do not comprehend it.

But why should a man who finds enjoyment in reading light books of the hour bother himself to acquire a taste for greater literature, even if he can learn to enjoy that also? In answer to that question, we may venture the assertion that learning to appreciate great books is worth a man's time and effort because ultimately they bring him the greater satisfaction. We may enjoy sitting on the sidelines and watching a game; but can that enjoyment com-

The Joy of  
Participation.

pare for a moment with the pleasure of being in the game itself, actively participating in the sport? There are times likewise when, weary or sick perhaps, we prefer to read some commonplace diverting story which makes no demand upon our thinking. Such a story has its place; yet the pleasure it affords cannot compare with the delight of getting into the game with the great masters, in those works of literature which call us into the fullest activity of thought, feeling, and imagination.

And besides the joy of participation, there is the joy which comes to us with consciousness of development. The young athlete takes pride in seeing his muscles grow stronger and his skill as a player increase.

**The Joy of Development.** However, he can continue such development only for a time. Sooner or later, failing skill and waning vigor will banish him to the sidelines. The reader can experience a similar joy of development, but he has a very decided advantage, in that his progress may continue as long as he lives. Reading good literature is a game which lasts a lifetime with no threat of banishment and no limiting of the satisfaction brought to us by the realization of intellectual growth.

Theoretically, as we have just seen, the best books ought to bring us the greatest delight; that they actually do so in the long run experience seems to prove. An

**The Test of Rereading.** interesting thought concerning the pleasure derivable from reading good literature is suggested by a statement made by Coleridge

in his *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge says that from all his "reading and meditation" he "abstracted two critical aphorisms," the first being—

"that not the poem which we have read, but that to which we *return* with the greatest pleasure possesses the genuine power, and claims the name of essential *poetry*."

In other words, Coleridge asserts that the poems which we enjoy rereading are the good poems. But can we maintain that the converse of his statement is true? Are the poems which are universally accepted as good the ones which will give us so much pleasure that we shall wish to reread them? In the long run, experience seems to prove that they are, provided that we understand them.

No one will deny that there are poems which we enjoy hearing or reading over and over again. Not many years ago, a reception was held in an American college town. A soprano soloist, a tenor soloist, and the college chapel choir were invited to furnish music. Through some oversight the musicians failed to meet beforehand and decide what they would sing. The result was amusing. Arriving first, the soprano sang her song. The tenor came next, and not knowing what his predecessor had done, offered the same selection. True to form, the college choir appeared last, and in similar ignorance of what had happened, rendered the same song for the third time. All those present were amused by the mix-up; yet no one complained of being bored at listening to the same song three times. And the song was this:

Drink to me only with thine eyes,  
And I will pledge with mine;  
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,  
And I'll not look for wine.



The thirst that from the soul doth rise  
Doth ask a drink divine;  
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,  
I would not change for thine.

I sent thee late a rosy wreath,  
Not so much honoring thee  
As giving it a hope that there  
It could not withered be;  
But thou thereon did'st only breathe  
And sent'st it back to me;  
Since when, it grows, and smells, I swear,  
Not of itself but thee!

That beautiful song is loved for its words as much as for its music; and the words were written by Ben Jonson, a friend and contemporary of Shakespeare's. Now does something not immediately suggest itself when we remember that this immensely popular lyric is more than three hundred years old? *Is it not likely that the same things which we listen to or read again and again with continued pleasure are the things which multitudes of people can read and reread with pleasure century after century? Does not this prove that the masterpieces which have the power to survive are, after all, those which give more pleasure? And since books which survive are the best books, are we not justified in maintaining that the best books will, if opportunity be given, yield us the greatest enjoyment?*

## QUESTIONS

1. What two questions confront us when we think of choosing the best books for our reading? 2. What ultimately determined the value of old swords? 3. What

parallel can be drawn between old swords and works of literature? 4. What famous Greek poems have survived for centuries? 5. What other works of literature can you mention which have shown power to survive? 6. What people should best know how to judge books, and why? 7. Can you name some people whose opinions about books you respect? 8. Do these people usually agree that literary works which have survived are good? 9. Are works which deal with matters of transitory interest likely to survive? 10. Will those books have a better chance if their themes of temporary interest are in some way connected with universal aspects of life? 11. What are some of the emotions which can be called universal? 12. Will the fact that the theme of a book is capable of arousing universal emotions save that book from oblivion, if it is not written in effective language? 13. Can you give any definite rules for recognizing effective language? 14. How do the great masterpieces of literature help us to determine whether the language in which a new book is written is effective or not? 15. Can you mention any works of literature which you have come to like after learning to understand them better? 16. In what way can the reading of books be compared to the playing of games? 17. What advantage does the reader of great books have over the reader of light ones? 18. What advantage does the reader have over the athlete? 19. Are good books usually able to be reread with pleasure? 20. Can you think of a book universally recognized as good which you have reread with pleasure?

## EXERCISES

### 1. Consider this extract:

Why do we care for literature? We care for literature primarily on account of its deep and lasting human significance. A great book grows directly out of life; in reading it, we are brought

into large, close, and fresh relations with life; and in that fact lies the final explanation of its power. Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is thus fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language.<sup>15</sup>

Name some book you have read which seems to answer to the description of a "great book" given in the extract above. Show in some detail how it fits the description.

2. Here is part of the advice which Erasmus wrote to a student at Lübeck:

Read first the best books on the subject which you have in hand. Why learn what you will have to unlearn? Why overload your mind with too much food, or with poisonous food? The important thing for you is not how much you know, but the quality of what you know.<sup>16</sup>

Do you think this advice would be of profit to the general reader as well as to the student? If so, why? What would you mean if you were to advise a reader not to overload his mind with too much food, or with poisonous food?

3. David Hume wrote the following in his essay, "The Standard of Taste":

The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and London. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory. Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator; but his reputation will never be durable or general. When his compositions are examined by posterity or by foreigners, his enchantment is dissipated, and the faults

<sup>15</sup> William Henry Hudson, *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*. Boston (D. C. Heath and Company), 1910, p. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Translated from the seventy-ninth epistle of Erasmus in J. A. Froude's *Life and Letters of Erasmus*. London (Longmans, Green and Company), 1910, p. 70.

appear in their true colours. On the contrary, a real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with. Envy and jealousy have too much place in a narrow circle; and even familiar acquaintance with his powers may diminish the applause due to his performances; but when these obstructions are removed, the beauties which are naturally fitted to excite agreeable sentiments, immediately display their energy: while the world endures they maintain their authority over the minds of men.<sup>17</sup>

In what does Hume find the ultimate test of greatness in literature? Why does he think that those who lived in the same narrow circle with an author are not so well prepared to appreciate or to judge his work as are "foreigners and posterity"? Can you name a writer who was underestimated by his contemporaries, and one who was overestimated? Sum up briefly in your own words the gist of Hume's statement.

4. In "An Answer to the Question, What is Poetry," an essay well worth reading, Leigh Hunt says:

If a young reader should ask, after all, What is the quickest way of knowing bad poets from good, the best poets from the next best, and so on? the answer is, the only and two-fold way: first, the perusal of the best poets with the greatest attention; and, second, cultivation of that love of truth and beauty which made them what they are.<sup>18</sup>

Does not Leigh Hunt mean that reading those poets who are accepted as the best will give us a taste for good poetry and thus help us to judge poets not yet definitely appraised? Think back over what we have studied in this chapter and show how certain poets come to be accepted as the best. Do

<sup>17</sup> *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*. London (Longmans, Green and Company), 1883, I, 271.

<sup>18</sup> Leigh Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy*. New York (Wiley and Putnam), 1845, p. 45.

you think that the study of good literature can teach one "love of truth and beauty"? Give examples of literary works which, in your opinion, can do this, and show how they do it.

5. In an essay on "Taste," William Crary Brownell makes the following observations:

It is a mistake to suppose that self-expression without self-control and enjoyment without standards of value are consonant with the effort that is a prerequisite to real achievement in either accomplishment or appreciation. Undisciplined self-expression riots in the absence of general taste, and the less exaction the writer experiences in the reader, the less effort he expends in rewarding or even securing his attention. The less demanded by the beholder of the picture, the statue, the building, the quicker the artist's sag into inertia. Ineptitude may easily be quite as genuine as significance, and if genuineness is the only demand public taste makes of the artist, if he is required to meet no standards or—what at this stage of the world's progress is the same thing—to neglect all models, the quality of his supply is bound to deteriorate in accordance with as fatal a law as that which makes water run down-hill.<sup>19</sup>

What application of the law of supply and demand do you find in this paragraph? In what way is the responsibility for the production of good literature placed upon the reader as much as upon the writer? Summarize briefly in your own words the essence of what the extract says.

<sup>19</sup> See *Scribner's*, Vol. LXI (April, 1927), p. 437.

### CHAPTER III

## WHAT GOOD LITERATURE CAN DO FOR US

**W**ILLIAM HAZLITT'S essay "On the Conduct of Life; or, Advice to a Schoolboy"—an essay which Hazlitt wrote for his son—contains this interesting statement about reading:

As to the books you will have to read by choice or for amusement, the best are the commonest. The names of many of them are already familiar to you. Read them as you grow up with all the satisfaction in your power, and make much of them. It is perhaps the greatest pleasure you will have in life, the one you will think of longest, and repent of least. If my life had been more full of calamity than it has been (much more than I hope yours will be), I would live it over again, my poor little boy, to read the books I did in my youth.

Not only does Hazlitt agree with us when we contend that good books give pleasure, but he even goes so far as to assert that the pleasure we can derive from such books is the greatest which life affords. The more we read literature, the more shall we be inclined to be of Hazlitt's opinion. And we shall not have to read far to discover that we are receiving benefit from those same books which bring us enjoyment. Indeed, if we rule out what is filthy or otherwise vicious, we may affirm that the reading of literature always offers us rewards compounded of profit and pleasure.

For one thing, literature can give the sheer joy of adventure. To most of us life allots comparatively few intensely exciting experiences. For every soldier of fortune who visits the ends of the earth and brushes close to death in desperate situations, there are thousands who stay at home to pass their years in the humdrum routine of a workaday world. And yet, no one of us need be denied the joy of travel or the zest of adventure. Nor do we have to snatch them at a "drowning hazard" from the sea, or win them at the risk of our lives in dare-devil escapades. Exacting no price and requiring no risk, literature will satisfy the longing for adventure. To be sure, literature is not life, but only the reflection and record of life. The experiences which come to us through books must necessarily lack the full reality of actual experiences. Nevertheless, book wanderings have their own peculiar advantages. They transport us beyond the barriers of time, enabling us to relive the life of vanished ages. Therefore we can say of literature what James Russell Lowell said about the "mere ability to read":

It revives for us without a miracle the Age of Wonder, endowing us with the shoes of swiftness and the cap of darkness, so that we walk invisible like fern-seed, and witness unharmed the plague at Athens or Florence or London; accompany Caesar on his marches, or look in on Catiline in council with his fellow conspirators or Guy Fawkes in the cellar of St. Stephens.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, those same books which reveal life as it was in days gone by also introduce us to some very delightful

<sup>1</sup> From Lowell's "Books and Libraries" in *The Works of James Russell Lowell* (Houghton Mifflin Company), VI, 84.

people. In life it is difficult to form just the friendships we desire; in literature it is easy. We can be members of Johnson's famous club and hear the autocratic old doctor laying down the law to the wits of his time; we can stand by the side of Carlyle and with him view the mighty drama of the French Revolution; we can listen to the quaint and charming discourse of Charles Lamb. In short, literature enables us to become acquainted with great men and women who are no longer living and whom we should probably never meet if they were living now. That is the gist of what Ruskin tells us in this familiar passage from his "Sesame and Lilies":

Friends  
in Books.

But, granting that we had both the will and the sense to choose our friends well, how few of us have the power! Or, at least, how limited, for most, is the sphere of choice! Nearly all our associations are determined by chance or necessity; and restricted within a narrow circle. We cannot know whom we would; and those whom we know, we cannot have at our side when we most need them. All the higher circles of human intelligence are, to those beneath, only momentarily and partially open. We may, by good fortune, obtain a glimpse of a great poet, and hear the sound of his voice; or put a question to a man of science, and be answered good-humoredly. We may intrude ten minutes' talk on a cabinet minister, answered probably with words worse than silence, being deceptive; or snatch, once or twice in our lives, the privilege of throwing a bouquet in the path of a Princess, or arresting the kind glance of a Queen. And yet these momentary chances we covet; and spend our years, and passions, and powers, in pursuit of little more than these; while, meantime, there is a society continually open to us, of



people who will talk to us as long as we like, whatever our rank or occupation; talk to us in the best words they can choose, and of the things nearest their hearts. And this society, because it is so numerous and so gentle, and can be kept waiting round us all day long—kings and statesmen lingering patiently, not to grant audience but to gain it!—in those plainly furnished and narrow anterooms, our book-case shelves—we make no account of that company—perhaps never listen to a word they would say, all day long!

And also we gain from the great men and women we meet in books something more than the pleasure of companionship. Among those men and women we find distinguished specialists in diverse fields of human activities, and they can show us things which otherwise might escape our notice. For example, unless we have made a study of art, a visit to an art museum is likely to yield us rather limited satisfaction. We wander bewildered through a maze of corridors, reading a few names under the pictures, but understanding little of what we see. If, however, a great critic of painting were to meet us at the entrance and suggest that we should look for certain characteristics in the pictures of some particular artist, or that we should watch for certain differences between the productions of one school and those of another, our subsequent stroll through the corridors would not be aimless. Our visit would immediately become interesting because it would have a definite purpose. If the great critics are not waiting for us at the doors of the museums, they are waiting for us in the pages of literature. There, we shall find, among many others, Sir Joshua Reynolds. He is known to us best as a painter,

The  
Guidance of  
Authorities.

but he also wrote well on subjects pertaining to art. Sir Joshua Reynolds says this:

The Italian attends only to the invariable, the great and general ideas which are fixed and inherent in universal nature; the Dutch, on the contrary, to literal truth and minute exactness in the detail, as I may say, of Nature modified by accident. The attention to these petty peculiarities is the very cause of this naturalness so much admired in the Dutch pictures, which, if we suppose it to be a beauty, is certainly of lower order, that ought to give place to a beauty of a superior kind, since one cannot be obtained but by departing from the other.<sup>2</sup>

And if we happen to remember this statement of Sir Joshua's the next time we go to a museum, it will be interesting to examine all the Italian masterpieces we can find and all the Dutch, looking carefully for the presence or absence of that particular quality which Sir Joshua assigns to the Italian pictures, and that different quality which he sees in the Dutch. In so doing we shall have the pleasure of testing the accuracy of the statement we have read. Moreover, we shall not be glancing casually at the pictures we see, but shall be studying them with considerable care; therefore we shall profit by our visit. And, of course, Reynolds is not the only critic who has left good suggestions recorded for us in literature. There is John Ruskin, and there are many others.

So it is in any department of human work and thought. Those friends which literature gives us are

<sup>2</sup> From a letter to *The Idler* in Number 79, Saturday, October 20, 1759. See *The Literary Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*. London (Henry S. Bohn), 1846, II, 128.

always ready to point out things which we might never see unaided. Besides, they will share their wisdom with us. They will disagree at times; and they will never be infallible. None of them has solved all life's problems; nevertheless, what they have to say will help us.

Another thing which literature does is to give us calmness, poise, sobriety. It teaches us not to exaggerate the importance of our individual experiences, but to

Calmness, Sobriety, Poise.	compare them with the experiences of others—to study them in their proper setting and see that their significance is relative rather than absolute. Literature thus helps us to view life as a whole. Walter Bagehot explains the matter very clearly when he says:
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A man who finds out for himself all that he knows, is rarely remarkable for calmness. The excitement of the discovery and a weak fondness for his own investigations—a parental inclination to believe in their excessive superiority—combine to make the self-taught and original man dogmatic, decisive, and detestable. He comes to you with a notion that Noah discarded in the ark, and attracts attention to it as if it were a stupendous novelty of his own. A book-bred man rarely does this; he knows that his notions are old notions, that his favorite theories are the rejected axioms of long-deceased people: he is too well aware of how much may be said for every side of everything to be often overweeningly positive on any point.<sup>3</sup>

If that is true of the man who reads books in general, it is particularly true of those who study literature; for

<sup>3</sup> From Bagehot's article on Oxford in the *Prospective Review*, Vol. VIII. See *The Works of Walter Bagehot*, published by the Travelers Insurance Company, Hartford, 1889, I, lxx.

in literature the whole life of man finds expression—the outer life of deed and fact, and the inner life of thought and feeling. Though a man read literature solely for pleasure, he cannot entirely escape receiving from it the kind of education which makes for sobriety and tolerance. As we journey in quest of adventure through the wonderland of books—books which mirror the life of countless yesterdays as well as the life teeming round us now—as we travel the highways and bypaths of literature, little by little, random facts and curious bits of “forgotten lore” culled carelessly by the roadside begin to explain each other and arrange themselves into intelligible patterns. Things thus arranged are easy to remember; related facts stick in our minds. As we learn more facts, the patterns extend; and soon we acquire well-ordered knowledge which teaches us not to give individual experiences undue value but to study life in perspective.

For most people the reading of *Beowulf* constitutes an excursion into a rather obscure bypath of literature. The poem is very old. Just when it was completed in its present form we do not know. It probably dates from the seventh century, and parts of it are certainly much older. Besides, it is written in Anglo-Saxon, a language which only specially trained students can understand. Yet if we read it even in translation, we shall find it full of charm. Of its many vivid pictures of the remote past surely one will abide in our memory. It is the description of Scyld's obsequies:

Him then they bore to the ocean stream—his dear companions—as he himself had commanded; as he, lord of the

Scyldings, had commanded when he had power to make his word good. There in the harbor stood the ring-stemmed ship. Long had he owned it—he, lord of the land. There now it stood all crusted with ice and ready to depart—the prince's ship. Then beside the mast they laid the famous one down—their beloved lord, the dispenser of rings. To that place much treasure was brought from afar; many precious things were brought there. I have not heard of any ship more splendidly furnished with war-weapons and armor, swords and corselets. On his breast lay many treasures that were to go with him into the power of the flood. Not less at all did they provide him with gifts—treasures of the people—than those had done who in the beginning had sent him forth alone over the waves when he was a child. And besides, they fixed a golden banner high over his head. They let the ocean have him—gave him to the sea. Solemn were their spirits; mournful was their mood. To say the truth, men do not know—counsellors in hall, warriors under the heavens—who received that burden.

All this is an expression of the primitive belief that the human soul finds its way to the other world across a stretch of water, the same belief which shows itself in the stories of the Styx. These people thought that by giving their king's body to the keeping of the waves, they were somehow helping his soul across the unseen mythical waters which barred it from the realm of departed spirits. It was a solemn ceremony which bespoke the mystery and finality of death. Yet indeed it was a scene suffused with glory. This was the passing of a king rich in years and triumphs; his soul was on its last adventure; and somehow as we see the old man's body decked in jewels and provided with weapons as is fitting for a king, resting in a ship which has no helmsman,

and drifting boldly out to face the buffeting of the waves, we are gripped by the heroic spirit of it all, and something seems to whisper that his soul likewise has gone undaunted.

But almost instantly this bit of curious lore which we have found in a bypath of literature will associate itself with a widely known episode in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Sir Bedivere carries the wounded Arthur to the shore of the "level lake":

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,  
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,  
Beneath them; and descending they were ware  
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,  
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—  
Three queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose  
A cry that shivered to the tingling stars,  
And, as it were one voice, an agony  
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills  
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,  
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmured Arthur, "Place me in the barge."  
So to the barge they came. There those three queens  
Put forth their hands, and took the king, and wept.

There it is—the same thing we saw in *Beowulf*. Again a great leader is voyaging to eternity across the waters of death. The two pictures have grouped themselves, and Tennyson's description of the passing of Arthur becomes fully intelligible and doubly beautiful in the light of what *Beowulf* has taught us. Here also we feel the glory of an heroic life. Although we miss something of the rugged daring, almost bravado, in the picture of

Scyld's departure, although the presence of the three weeping women seems here to foreshadow for Arthur peace after pain; nevertheless, we know that this is the passing of a great spirit—of Arthur, the king.

Now suppose that we have read carefully the passages just given and that their similarity has caused them to become fixed in our memory. With that much added to our store of knowledge we journey on, and possibly we chance upon Walt Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!"—a poem written in honor of Abraham Lincoln:

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,  
 The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,  
 The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
 While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;  
     But O heart! heart! heart!  
     O the bleeding drops of red,  
       Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
       Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;  
 Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,  
 For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores  
     a-crowding,  
 For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;  
     Here Captain! dear father!  
     This arm beneath your head!  
     It is some dream that on the deck,  
     You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,  
 My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,  
 The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and  
     done.

From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;  
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!  
But I with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.

Here once more we see the death of a great leader associated with a ship and the crossing of water; but this time there is not the slightest symbolic connection with Arthur's funeral barge or Scyld's ice-encrusted vessel. This ship is not going out; it is coming in. It is a very different ship; it is the ship of state. But the mere presence of boats and water reminds us of the two old legends; and once reminded of them, we see the real similarity—the presence of the hero-spirit, which is the same in Scyld, Arthur, or Lincoln, the hero-spirit which is the same always. Therefore this poem about Lincoln is not so far afield from *Beowulf* and the Arthurian legend as it may at first seem.

The man who sees things only through the eyes of his own limited experience may bend in despair and utter defeatist prophecies, but the man who knows the story of our race will not trust to his limited experience. He can look back through history and supply the missing links in that long chain which binds the courageous spirit of Lincoln to that of Scyld. He knows that the blood of Scyld and Arthur is mingled in our veins, and he will trust that the hero-spirit of old which has never utterly failed us will continue to reappear in leaders yet unborn. And that is but one example of how literature can help us to see life as a whole, and therefore judge things with greater calmness, and tolerance.

Finally, literature can render us one more great ser-



vice. Literature can express for us those things to which few can adequately give utterance. And some kind of utterance is a very real necessity, for experience teaches us that emotion demands expression. We may draw a picture, write a poem, sing, or even whistle; but always we yearn to express in some way the emotion which has possession of us. The picture, the poem, or the song is like a safety valve on a boiler; when the pressure becomes too great, the valve releases some of the steam. In the case of the lesser emotions we may find our own ways to relief. There are, however, universal emotions so deep and so intense that only the greatest artists can express them well. The world would be spared many wretched memorial verses if only more people would commit to memory such lines as these:

Emotional  
Relief.

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell  
When I embark;

For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place,  
The flood may bear me far,

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I hope to see my pilot face to face  
When I have crossed the bar.

These are but a few of the many gifts which literature has to offer and will give freely to those willing to receive them. *Literature will satisfy the craving for adventure, will introduce us into the select society of the great men and women of all times, will provide us with the guidance and counsel of those best fitted to aid us, will teach us tolerance and poise by enabling us to view life as a whole, and will give us the emotional relief of expression by saying for us the things we should wish to say just as we should wish to say them.*

### QUESTIONS

1. What advice about books did Hazlitt give to his son?
2. How can literature give us the joy of adventure?
3. What works of literature have you read from which you have received this kind of joy?
4. Who are some of the great men and women with whom you have become acquainted through books? Could you have met all of them in real life? Could you have met any of them in real life?
5. Which of them do you think you would especially have enjoyed meeting in actual life, and why?
6. Have any of the people you have met in books helped you to a better appreciation of art, or music, or nature, or human character? If so, who were they, and how did each one help you? In what books did you meet them?
7. How can good books teach us calmness, sobriety, and poise?
8. What is meant by "seeing life as a whole"?
9. How can books help us to see life as a whole?
10. What is the value of thus viewing life?
11. How can literature bring us emotional relief?

## EXERCISES

1. Consider this passage carefully in the light of what we have been studying:

Much of the world's great poetry has been written by those who thought that art is a kind of imitation; that literature should describe life. That belief was long ago superseded in large measure by the view, most sympathetically explained by Matthew Arnold, that the function of literature was to be not a description, but, in some sense, a criticism of life. This view is still widely held, but in its turn has given way to the belief that the business of literature is to provide an escape from life, that art has a realm of its own in which it demands worship for its own sake, and that the function of poetry is to give to its readers a pleasure which they cannot find in their life of every day.

Another view seems to prevail with those poets and critics who are to-day most influential. This is the view that literature should not describe or criticize life, still less provide an escape from the world, but should somehow epitomize life; that a piece of writing should be an expression, as exact as possible, of some phase or moment of experience, that it should be the writer's aim to reproduce or to typify "a consciousness."<sup>4</sup>

Name some piece of literature that seems to you to describe or record life, and show what it describes or records. Does it succeed in doing what it sets out to do? Name a poem or a piece of prose which interprets or criticizes life. Do you agree with the criticism? Why? Name some work of literature in which you found temporary escape from the stress, confusion, and boredom of life. Show how it helped you to escape. Name a piece of literature which reproduces some moment of experience, typifies a consciousness. Show what value you think you derived from reading this work. Did it give you pleasure? Why?

<sup>4</sup> John Sparrow, *Sense and Poetry*. New Haven (Yale University Press), 1934. Introduction, ix.

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2. Among other things which William Ellery Channing said about literature is this:

It is the mind giving to multitudes, whom no voice can reach, its compressed and selected thoughts in the most lucid order and attractive forms which it is capable of inventing. In other words, literature is the concentration of intellect for the purpose of spreading itself abroad and multiplying its energy.<sup>5</sup>

What does this mean? Do you agree with Channing? Does this suggest that literature can do something for us? Show how.

3. Explain the meaning of the following passage in your own words, and state why you agree or disagree with the ideas which it sets forth:

Most of us are songs without words; only the few know the words, but all feel the thrill when the words are sung. It may be sorrow, or joy, or mere perplexity, or dull indifference, but, whatever it is, it craves expression.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> From Channing's *Remarks on National Literature*. See *The Works of William E. Channing, D.D.* Boston (American Unitarian Association), 1897, p. 126.

<sup>6</sup> C. Alphonso Smith, *What Can Literature Do for Me?* New York (Doubleday, Doran and Company), 1913, p. 23.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUBJECTIVITY AND OBJECTIVITY IN LITERATURE

**ALTHOUGH** the particular works which go to make up literature are alike in so far as they possess in common those distinguishing characteristics which we have noted, they differ from each other in many ways, and we cannot study them to the best advantage without first simplifying our task by separating them into classes. Unfortunately, we can never classify works of literature with the same ease and certainty with which a stamp collector, let us say, can catalogue his stamps. Just as we found it impossible to define literature in any brief and satisfactory way, we shall likewise find ourselves baffled if we attempt to give a brief definition of any subdivision within literature. And even where we can distinguish certain types, we shall be unable to establish fixed boundary lines between them. In other words, there are writings which stand in a kind of no-man's-land between two types and cannot be assigned to either with assurance. In due time we shall study the traditional forms such as the lyric, the novel, and the essay; but for the present let us confine our attention to certain groupings of a more general nature. In this chapter we shall study the difference between those works of literature which are designated as subjective and those which are termed objective.

Difficulty of  
Classification.

Usually a piece of writing is called subjective when it expresses the writer's personal thoughts and emotions and when it reflects something of his personality. Milton's famous sonnet on his blindness is subjective, for in it Milton himself shows us how he is affected by the realization of his terrible affliction:

Ordinary  
Subjectivity.

When I consider how my light is spent  
 Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,  
 And that one Talent which is death to hide  
 Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent  
 To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
 My true account, lest He returning chide,  
 "Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?"  
 I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent  
 That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need  
 Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best  
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
 Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed,  
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest;  
 They also serve who only stand and wait."

Although we hear the voice of Milton and become aware, so to speak, of his presence, this sonnet is not narrowly subjective. It begins with the expression of that which is very personal, Milton's blindness; it ends, however, with a thought capable of wide application. Blindness is one of the worst possible afflictions; yet there are other disabilities great and small. Most of us labor against discouragement in some form; and for that reason, we can put ourselves, more or less, in Milton's place. Therefore, though Milton is primarily the

spokesman for himself, by counseling patience he becomes indirectly the spokesman for others.

Now subjectivity becomes more marked as the writer tends to throw more stress upon what is peculiar to him as an individual and less upon what he experiences in common with others. In subjective work of this kind we are likely to see the writer's personality more vividly reflected. To make the difference clear, let us quote Browning's "Prospice":

Marked  
Subjectivity.

Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,  
 The mist in my face,  
 When the snows begin, and the blasts denote  
 I am nearing the place,  
 The power of the night, the press of the storm,  
 The post of the foe;  
 Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,  
 Yet the strong man must go:  
 For the journey is done and the summit attained,  
 And the barriers fall,  
 Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
 The reward of it all.  
 I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,  
 The best and the last!  
 I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,  
 And bade me creep past.  
 No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers,  
 The heroes of old,  
 Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears  
 Of pain, darkness, and cold.  
 For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,  
 The black minute's at end,

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And the elements' rage, the fiend voices that rave,  
Shall dwindle, shall blend,  
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,  
Then a light, then thy breast,  
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,  
And with God be the rest.

In one respect at least, this poem contrasts sharply with Milton's. Although "Prospice" is connected indirectly with universals, the connection is not so apparent as it was in the sonnet. In a way Browning may be considered the spokesman for others who hope to face death bravely and look with confidence towards glad reunions after death; but the poem makes us think chiefly of Browning and of what concerned Browning as an individual. In Milton's sonnet we feel a certain broadening out; in "Prospice" a narrowing down to something even more intensely personal than that which was expressed at the beginning, for the one Browning hopes to meet again is his wife. Therefore most people would certainly agree that "Prospice" is more highly subjective than Milton's sonnet.

But subjectivity can go much further. We meet with extreme subjectivity when we find a writer who seems to disregard all emotional fellowship with mankind and seeks to magnify those qualities in himself which make him different from other men. Rousseau clearly aimed at an extreme subjectivity when he wrote his celebrated *Confessions*, for in his opening sentences he says:

I have entered on a performance which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to



present my fellow-mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself.

I know my heart, and I have studied mankind; I am not made like anyone I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality, and whether Nature did wisely in breaking the mold with which she formed me, only can be determined after having read this Work.

Whenever the last trumpet shall sound, I will present myself before the sovereign Judge with this book in my hand, and loudly proclaim, Thus have I acted; these were my thoughts; such was I.<sup>1</sup>

Such was Rousseau's intention, but it goes without saying that he did not fully succeed. However sincerely a man may think himself different and however much he may wish himself to be, he cannot be utterly different from others if he is to remain a man at all. What Rousseau could do was to emphasize his peculiarity, and that he did with no little success.

And there is another kind of extreme subjectivity. A writer may have thoughts and feelings which are inspired by his own wild imaginings and which not only go outside the realm of ordinary experience, but even transcend reality. In *Epipsychidion*, for example, Shelley speaks of an ethereal being—a woman “robed in such exceeding glory” that though he met her often in his spirit wanderings, he “beheld her not.” Surely subjectivity cannot be carried further than that. It has been said that Shelley was here thinking of Harriet Grove,<sup>2</sup> whom he had loved in his youth, but whoever

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau*. London (William Glaisner), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> See W. E. Peck, *Shelley, His Life and Work*. Boston and New York, 1927, II, 191.

may have inspired the lines, the woman whom he actually describes could have no real existence outside his own imagination:

There was a Being whom my spirit oft  
Met on its visioned wanderings, far aloft,  
In the clear golden prime of my youth's dawn,  
Upon the fairy isles of sunny lawn,  
Amid the enchanted mountains, and the caves  
Of divine sleep, and on the air-like waves  
Of wonder-level dream, whose tremulous floor  
Paved her light steps. On an imagined shore,  
Under the gray beak of some promontory  
She met me, robed in such exceeding glory  
That I beheld her not.

Theoretically, objective writing should be the direct opposite of subjective. Absolute objectivity would demand that the writer's thoughts and feelings should not be disclosed even to the slightest degree and that his personality should in no wise be revealed. Whether any one has ever attained an objectivity so complete is a debatable question, but it is generally agreed that Homer of all writers holds himself most consistently detached from his work. Let us therefore turn to Homer's poetry for an illustration of objective writing. Here are some lines from the *Iliad*, translated by Tennyson:

So Hector spake; the Trojans roared applause;  
Then loosed their sweating horses from the yoke,  
And each beside his chariot bound his own;  
And oxen from the city, and goodly sheep  
In haste they drove, and honey-hearted wine

And bread from out the houses brought, and heaped  
 Their firewood, and the winds from off the plain  
 Rolled the rich vapor far into the heaven.  
 And these all night upon the bridge of war  
 Sat glorying; many a fire before them blazed.  
 As when in heaven the stars above the moon  
 Look beautiful, when all the winds are laid,  
 And every height comes out, and jutting peak  
 And valley, and the immeasurable heavens  
 Break open to their highest, and all the stars  
 Shine, and the shepherd gladdens in his heart;  
 So many a fire between the ships and stream  
 Of Xanthus blazed before the towers of Troy,  
 A thousand on the plain; and close by each  
 Sat fifty in the blaze of burning fire;  
 And eating hoary grain and pulse the steeds,  
 Fixt by their cars, waited the golden dawn.

In this passage nothing is personal. At times a dim shadow of the author may seem to hover near us; yet we can nowhere distinguish Homer as Homer. He makes no comment, but leaves us alone with the truly magnificent scene which he has pictured.

At this point we must take something else into consideration. Naturally we use the pronoun of the first person when we refer to ourselves, and the pronouns of the third person when we speak of things external to ourselves. The use of the first person, therefore, implies subjectivity. But often a writer will employ the first person, which necessarily gives the impression of subjectivity, to express ideas and emotions not peculiarly his own, or the third person, which gives the impression of

Subjective  
 Presentation  
 of Objec-  
 tivity.

objectivity, to voice his personal thoughts and feelings. A few illustrations will make this matter clear and show that it is not without importance.

First let us look at this fairly representative passage from *Robinson Crusoe*, a book which is written in the first person:

I was ready to burst with holding my breath, when, as I felt myself rising up, so, to my immediate relief, I found my head and hands shoot out above the surface of the water; and though it was not two seconds of time that I could keep myself so, yet it relieved me greatly, gave me breath and new courage. I was covered again with water a good while, but not so long but I held it out; and finding the water had spent itself, and began to return, I struck forward against the return of the waves, and felt the ground again with my feet.

All this is presented subjectively; yet *Robinson Crusoe* is usually held to be one of the most thoroughly objective books in our language. From Crusoe's point of view the passage is subjective, but from the author's not at all. Defoe keeps himself completely aloof, letting Crusoe have full possession of the stage. In using the first person Defoe takes advantage of a literary device frequently employed by modern writers of short stories; by letting Crusoe do all the telling, he makes the narrative seem more vividly real. The subjective presentation is thus clearly advantageous in this case, and it does not lessen the inherent objectivity of the book because we realize fully that Defoe is truly holding himself detached and not using Crusoe in any way as a mouth-piece.

But the conditions which we meet in *Robinson Crusoe* may be exactly reversed. An excellent illustration is to be found in one of Cardinal Newman's sermons. In 1842, after the furor created by the publication of Tract 90, Newman left Oxford and went to live at Littlemore, a village within walking distance of Oxford, where he had bought some cottages and built a church. On September 25 of 1843, being now sure that he was going to enter the Roman communion, he preached at Littlemore a sermon entitled "The Parting of Friends," the last paragraph of which reads as follows:

Objective  
Presentation  
of Subject-  
ivity.

And, O my brethren, O kind and affectionate hearts, O loving friends, should you know any one whose lot it has been, by writing or by word of mouth, in some degree to help you thus to act; if he has ever told you what you knew about yourselves, or what you did not know; has read to you your wants or feelings, and comforted you by the very reading; has made you feel that there was a higher life than this daily one, and a brighter world than that you see; or encouraged you, or sobered you, or opened a way to the enquiring, or soothed the perplexed; if what he has said or done has ever made you take interest in him, and feel well inclined towards him; remember such a one in time to come, though you hear him not, and pray for him, that in all things he may know God's will, and at all times he may be ready to fulfill it.<sup>3</sup>

Though the one to whom this passage refers is described

<sup>3</sup> In commenting on the sermon Wilfred Ward remarks: "It was the last public scene of the silent tragedy which was being enacted. He told in that sermon, clearly for those who understood, how he himself had found the Church of his birth and of his early affections wanting; how he was torn between the claims of those he must leave behind and those who would follow him; that he could speak to his friends no more from that pulpit, but could only commit them to God and bid them strive to do His will. His voice broke (so the tradition runs)

in the third person, it is clear that Newman was speaking of himself and bidding farewell to "the Church of his birth and of his early affections." In these words there is the pathos of a whole life, the utterance of an experience profoundly personal; yet observe how the use of *he*, instead of *I*, really deepens the emotion while freeing it of any taint of egotism.<sup>4</sup>

In prose fiction and in the drama, we usually find a condition similar to that which we noticed in *Robinson Crusoe*. The writer generally stands in objective relation to the speeches of the characters, and each speaker is supposed to say what a man of his type would think or feel in the given situation and not to express the thoughts and feelings of the writer. Of course, we find exceptions. In the case of problem plays or novels certain characters are likely to serve as mouthpieces for the author and thus indirectly give his views concerning the problem under discussion. And sometimes a writer's personality may be revealed here and there in a work which on the whole is objective. Theoretically, Hamlet's celebrated

and his words were interrupted by the sobs of his hearers as he said his last words of farewell."

What the silencing of that voice meant for those who had been used to hear it is told by Principal Shairp: "It was as when, to one kneeling by night, in the silence of some vast cathedral, the great bell tolling solemnly overhead has suddenly gone still."

<sup>4</sup> A lessening of subjectivity is often produced, especially in poetry, by the use of the pastoral form. As we know, Milton wrote "Lycidas" in honor of Edward King, who was drowned at sea. Milton had known King at Cambridge, but the two had not been intimate friends. Had Milton done nothing to soften the subjectivity of "Lycidas," the grief expressed might seem insincere. However, the use of the pastoral form prevents Milton from appearing too prominently; and when we read the poem, we feel that nothing has been overdone. It was not so necessary for Tennyson to employ such a device in his *In Memoriam* because Tennyson's elegy was inspired by grief for Arthur Hallam, a dearly beloved friend.

soliloquy voices not Shakespeare's thoughts about suicide, but Hamlet's. Nevertheless, the reference to the "law's delay" and to other matters of little relevance to the story has caused some people to suspect that the great dramatist allowed a good deal of his own feeling to find utterance in Hamlet's words. However, to press such interpretation too far would be unsafe, and, for the most part, we may expect plays and novels to represent objective writing.

What we have learned about subjectivity and objectivity in literature will be of value to us in later chapters, but we can immediately apply that knowledge advantageously. We shall probably not be going much too far if we make the sweeping statement that information concerning a writer's life will always help us to a better understanding of his works. Of course, if he succeeds in keeping himself detached so that his works are as thoroughly objective as the *Iliad*, let us say, a knowledge of his life, though desirable, is not absolutely necessary; but as soon as he permits his thoughts and emotions or his own personality to creep into what he writes, we need to know something about him if we are to have a full understanding of what he tells us. We may say, therefore, that in the case of the less thoroughly objective works of literature a knowledge of the author is desirable, and that in the case of truly subjective writings it is indeed necessary. We can make the point clear so far as subjective work is concerned by studying a sonnet of Wordsworth's.

On August 7, 1802, Wordsworth wrote these lines near Calais on the road to Ardres:

The Work  
Explained  
by the Life.

Jones! as from Calais southward you and I  
 Went pacing side by side, this public Way  
 Streamed with the pomp of a too-credulous day,  
 When faith was pledged to new-born Liberty:  
 A homeless sound of joy was in the sky:  
 From hour to hour the antiquated Earth  
 Beat like the heart of Man: songs, garlands, mirth,  
 Banners, and happy faces, far and nigh!  
 And now, sole register that these things were,  
 Two solitary greetings have I heard,  
 "Good-morrow, Citizen!" a hollow word,  
 As if a dead man spake it! Yet despair  
 Touches me not, though pensive as a bird  
 Whose vernal coverts winter hath laid bare.

At first reading, the poem does not mean very much to us. However, let us look into it more closely, giving free rein to our curiosity. Who was Jones? When and under what circumstances did Wordsworth and Jones go "pacing side by side" that "public Way"? Why the contrast between the mood of joy suggested by the "banners and happy faces" and the feeling of reserve and regret suggested by the mention of "solitary greetings" and the use of the words "sole register that these things were"?

On July 14, 1790, Wordsworth set out from Calais for a walking trip to the Alps, his companion being a young friend named Jones.<sup>5</sup> Of Jones and the significance of July 14, Wordsworth himself has left us an account:

. . . I set off for the Continent, in companionship with Robert Jones, a Welshman, a fellow-collegian. We went

<sup>5</sup> Wordsworth sailed from Dover on July 13. See Christopher Wordsworth, *Memoirs of William Wordsworth*. Boston, 1851, Vol. I, 55.



staff in hand, without knapsacks, and carrying each his needs tied up in a pocket handkerchief, with about twenty pounds apiece in our pockets. We crossed from Dover to Calais on the eve of the day when the king was to swear fidelity to the new Constitution: an event which was solemnized with due pomp at Calais. On the afternoon of that day we started and slept at Ardres.

Quickly we recall that July 14, 1789, marked the fall of the Bastille. Therefore Wordsworth was in France on the anniversary of an event which has tremendous importance in French history. The king was to sign a liberal constitution. All France was filled with joy. Wordsworth himself testifies to that fact when he says in his *Prelude*, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive." At Paris the multitude in the Champ de Mars assemble to witness the signing of the momentous document. Carlyle gives a vivid description of the scene:

. . . The King swears; and now *be* the welkin split with vivats: let citizens enfranchised embrace, each smiting heartily his palm into his fellow's; and armed Federates clang their arms; above all, that floating battery speak! It has spoken—to the four corners of France. From eminence to eminence bursts the thunder; faint-heard, loud-repeated. What a stone cast into what a lake; in circles that do *not* grow fainter. From Arras to Avignon; from Metz to Bayonne! Over Orléans and Blois it rolls, in cannon-recitative; Puy bellows of it amid his granite mountains; Pau where is the shell-cradle of Great Henri. At far Marseilles, one can think, the ruddy evening witnesses it; over the deep-blue Mediterranean waters, the Castle of If ruddy-tinted darts forth, from every cannon's mouth its tongue of fire; and all the people shout: Yes, France is free.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> From *The French Revolution*. "The Constitution," Bk. I, Ch. xii.

Thus we see now what Wordsworth meant by the "banners and happy faces"; but let us continue.

In 1802, he returned to France, this time alone; and retracing his way along the road to Ardres, he was struck by the absence of that widespread joy which he had witnessed before. Much had happened to change the spirit of the French people. France had passed through the Reign of Terror, and Napoleon had risen to power. Assuming the modest title of First Consul, the Corsican had in reality made himself master of the country. Liberty had first overgrown itself into license and then yielded place to a military dictatorship. Menacing clouds had obscured the day which Wordsworth and Jones had seen dawning for France, and Wordsworth, a true lover of liberty, disgusted by the excesses of the Revolution and saddened by the turn things had taken, looked back regretfully to the day in 1790 when he had walked the same road with his friend, sharing wholeheartedly in the joy and enthusiasm of France.

Having learned something of what lay behind the sonnet, we should be able to enjoy it more on second reading. As a piece of subjective writing, it tells what Wordsworth felt on a certain occasion, and now that we understand the circumstances which brought it into being, we can feel its emotional force more keenly than before. And what we have seen illustrated here is more or less true of all subjective work. Indeed one of the chief reasons why we read biographies of great writers is that a knowledge of their lives will enable us to understand more fully all those works in which they have revealed their thoughts and emotions.

On the other hand, we can reverse the whole process

and often discover a great deal concerning an author's personality and his life simply by studying what he has

written. Even when the work before us is objective, we may usually learn something.

The Life  
Revealed by  
the Work.

If the objectivity is nearly absolute, we shall not get very far. For instance, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* tell us very little about Homer if they tell us anything at all; but they represent an extreme case. Objective works frequently contain allusions which help us, particularly allusions to books; and if we know what a man has read, we can form some idea of his tastes and interests. Any information of that kind is worth searching for; nevertheless, we must always be careful. "The Ancient Mariner," though it is objective, discloses a good deal of information about Coleridge; but if we take the fine descriptions of the sea which are to be found in this poem as evidence that Coleridge had traveled much on the ocean, we shall be led astray. As a matter of fact, when Coleridge wrote "The Ancient Mariner," he had never been to sea.

In the drama particularly we must be cautious. As we have seen already, something of Shakespeare's own experience may be incorporated in Hamlet's soliloquy; yet even there we can be sure of nothing. Now and then in the plays we may find hints of Shakespeare himself, but the minute we begin to see his personal thoughts and emotions in the speeches of all his characters, we reduce him to an absurdity. If the words of Shakespeare's many characters represent what he himself believed and felt and not just imagined thoughts and feelings appropriate to particular characters in particular situations, then he must have had at one and the same time the

mind and heart of a murderer and a saint, a philosopher and a fool. The reading of his plays will unquestionably give us a vague general impression of his personality well worth possessing. We shall realize more fully the vast scope of his intellect and the depth of his insight into human nature. But if we take those plays and attempt to make from them a definite reconstruction of his religion or his opinions about life, we shall end in futile speculation.

In the case of subjective writing, however, we usually have more success. Even from the one sonnet of Wordsworth's which we have studied we learn that the writer had traveled in France, that he could make friends, and that he was a lover of liberty. "Prospice," the poem which we selected from Browning, reveals its author as a man of faith, courage, and optimism. And if we look further into the works of either Wordsworth or Browning, we shall constantly be gaining a better understanding of those men and a better knowledge of their lives. Indeed it has been said that Wordsworth's biography is written in his poetry. The statement might be applied likewise to Browning, to a considerable extent. For example, "Home Thoughts from Abroad" tells us of his patriotic love for England; "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix" suggests that he took interest in horses; "Up at a Villa—Down in the City" shows his familiarity with Italy and Italian life. And thus we might continue on and on, though we should always feel most strongly Browning's three cardinal characteristics—faith, courage, and optimism, and think of him primarily as—

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,  
 Never doubted clouds would break,  
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would  
 triumph,  
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,  
 Sleep to wake.

This first excursion into the problem of making classifications in literature has at least given us some idea of the difference between subjective and objective writing.

*Summary. We have seen that there are many variations and exceptions, but that the subjective writer stands in a more intimate personal relation to his work than the objective. We have also seen that, particularly in the case of subjective writing, we need to know the writer's life if we are to derive the greatest possible pleasure from his works and if we are to comprehend them fully. And we have learned that we can often find out much about a writer by studying what he has written, especially when the works in question are subjective.*

## QUESTIONS

1. Why is it difficult to classify works of literature?
2. What is meant by ordinary subjectivity?
3. In what way is Milton, in his sonnet on his blindness, the spokesman for others as well as for himself?
4. In what way is Browning's "Prospice" more markedly subjective than the sonnet just mentioned?
5. When do writings exemplify extreme subjectivity?
6. What is the weakness of subjectivity when it is as extreme as in Shelley's *Epipsychidion*?
7. What is meant by objectivity?
8. What is meant by subjective presentation of objectivity?
9. How does *Robinson Crusoe* illustrate this?
10. What is meant by the objective pres-

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entation of subjectivity? How does the passage quoted from Newman illustrate this? 11. Are novels and plays usually subjective or objective? 12. To what extent does a knowledge of an author's life help us to a better understanding of his works? 13. Have you ever acquired a better understanding of a poem or a novel by knowing something of its author's life? If so, what poem or novel, and what author? Just how did your knowledge of the life increase your appreciation of the work? 14. When are works of literature likely to throw light on the author's life? Is there any writer with whose life you have become more familiar by reading his works? If so, who is he? What did you learn about him?

### EXERCISES

1. From the literary works which you have read pick out one which you consider subjective and show by specific references to its content the reasons for your opinion.

2. From the books or poems which you have read choose one which you consider objective and state the reasons on which you base your opinion.

3. State the advantages of the subjective method and those of the objective, illustrating by specific references to books you have read.

4. Explain the following statement made by Walt Whitman:

Subjective—out of the person himself. Objective—of other persons, things, events, places, characters, etc.

5. Samuel Butler, in his novel *The Way of All Flesh*, says:

Every man's work, whether it be literature or music or pictures or architecture or anything else, is always a portrait of himself, and the more he tries to conceal himself the more clearly will his character appear in spite of him. I may very likely be condemning myself, all the time that I am writing this book, for I know that

whether I like it or no I am portraying myself more surely than I am portraying the characters I set before the reader.<sup>7</sup>

Do you think that what Butler says is right, or wrong, or partly right and partly wrong? State reasons for your answer.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh*. New York (E. P. Dutton and Company), 1916, p. 70.

## CHAPTER V

### CLASSICISM AND PSEUDO-CLASSICISM

WHEN we read books of criticism, we constantly meet with such terms as *classicism*, *romanticism*, *idealism*, *realism*, and *naturalism*, each of which designates a particular body of literary principles and characteristics.

We also find works of literature described by corresponding terms such as *classical* and *romantic*, according to the principles and characteristics which they exemplify; and we see the authors of those works referred to as belonging to the *classical school*, the *romantic school*, and so on. No terms in all literature are more difficult to define than these. In dealing with them we are confronted by the same vague and subtle distinctions which trouble us elsewhere; and besides, numerous complications arise because some of the very words which we wish to explain may have two or more different meanings. We can, however, form rough ideas of what these baffling terms mean. In this chapter, let us give our attention to classicism and pseudo-classicism.

The story goes that in the reign of Servius Tullius the Romans were divided into classes according to the amount of property they owned, and that those in the wealthiest or highest class became known as *classici*. If the story is true, the term *classici* could easily have been applied by analogy to writers and writings of the highest class. But

The Term  
*Classicism*.



whether the story be true or not, we know that in the second century, Aulus Gellius,<sup>1</sup> used the phrase *classicus scriptor . . . non proletarius* to designate a "high-class" writer.<sup>2</sup> Later, writings of the first class in Greek and Latin began to be called *classics*. Then, in the course of time and for reasons which are not fully understood, people began to refer to Greek and Latin as the *classical* languages. The transference of the epithet may have been caused in part by the notion once prevalent that Greek and Latin are superior to the modern languages, or, in other words, that they are languages of the highest class. But whatever the causes may have been, the transfer was made, and as a result we use the words *classic* and *classical* in several ways. In the first place, we can say of any literary work accepted as a masterpiece, be it ancient or modern, that it is a *classic*. For example, we can call both the *Iliad* and Goethe's *Faust* classics, although one belongs to the literature of ancient Greece and the other to modern German literature. In the second place, we can refer to Greek and Latin as the *classical* languages and to works written in those languages as *classics* or *classical* works. Thus we can call the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* *classics* when we are not thinking primarily of their excellence but chiefly of the fact that they were written in Greek. Finally, we can designate as *classical* all those works, ancient or modern, which exemplify what is known as *classicism*. For instance, we can say that the plays of Racine are *classical*, although they are written in French. But what is *classicism*?

<sup>1</sup> Author of *Noctes Atticae*.

<sup>2</sup> See the *New English Dictionary* under *classic*.

We use the term *classicism* when we have in mind certain fundamental qualities conspicuously present in the literature of Greece and Rome. The force or spirit from the working of which those qualities resulted is usually called the classical spirit, but the name is somewhat misleading. Since the epithet *classical* con-

notes things Greek and Roman, we are tempted to associate the classical spirit and classicism too closely with Greece and Rome. Therefore when we give the name *classical* to the spirit which produced the particular qualities here in question and when we give the name *classicism* to those qualities, there are two very important facts which we must not forget. One is that the classical spirit was not the only force at work in Greek and Roman literature. There is sufficient evidence to prove that the romantic spirit, to mention just one other, was not idle. The second fact is that although the classical spirit exercised an especially marked influence upon the literature of Greece and Rome, it has influenced other literatures as well. If we accept these two reservations, we can safely apply the terms *classical* and *classicism* respectively to that particular spirit and those particular qualities which we are about to study. And we can say that *classicism* stands for the fundamental qualities born of the classical spirit wherever they may appear.

Critical study of the ancient literary productions which were inspired by the classical spirit began rather early—as early at least as the time of Aristotle, from whose *Poetics* most of the later classical rules and dogmas are ultimately derived. The enthusiasm for the old Greek and Roman writers which characterized the

Renaissance gave impetus to the formation of classical dogmas, and by the close of the sixteenth century an important body of classical doctrines had been established. They resulted to a considerable extent from the interpretation and expansion of statements found in Aristotle; and since some of the statements were obviously misunderstood and misinterpreted, some of the resulting rules and dogmas were false from the point of view of true classicism.

For a little while we find works in French—a modern language—which have much of the real classical spirit. Take Racine for example. Although he was familiar with the rules which had already taken form, it is difficult to believe that he was not inspired by the true classical spirit. But as the rules, and particularly the false rules, began to dominate more and more, men who wrote under the guidance of those rules rather than the direct inspiration of the classical spirit came to produce works which are not classical in the true sense of the word. Though such works are sometimes described as classical, they are often distinguished from the ancient classical writings by the name *neo-classical*, in which the prefix *neo* means *late*. Sometimes, and more correctly, they are distinguished by the name *pseudo-classical*, in which the prefix *pseudo* means *false*. We have, then, two extremes: we have the Greek and Roman classical works, which came into being before the dogmatizing of the critics had any considerable effect upon literature and which result, for the most part, from the classical spirit directly; <sup>3</sup> and we

<sup>3</sup> The Latin poet, Virgil, came after some of the dogmas had been formulated, but we do not feel any ill effects from them in his poems.

have the pseudo-classical works, which belong, in the main, to the eighteenth century so far as English literature is concerned. Between those extremes there are all kinds of works more or less truly classical. In this book, however, we must confine ourselves to a study of the early classicism of Greek and Roman literature and the pseudo-classicism of eighteenth-century English literature.

Since the classical spirit influenced the architecture of Greece and Rome as profoundly as it influenced Greek and Roman literature and since architecture offers us something definitely visible and tangible, let us begin

our study of the original and true classicism by examining a typical specimen of classical architecture. If we look at any picture which shows the front elevation of a Greek temple, we see at once that the beauty of the edifice lies in its balance and proportion, which produces the effect of repose. The columns are like great arms pushing upward, and the suggestion of force exerted upward is intensified if, as is often the case, they are fluted. But the great mass of the entablature with its superimposed roof gives the appearance of crushing weight—of force pressing downward. We enjoy looking at a Greek temple because the columns are neither too large nor too small. The Greeks knew how to design them of just the right size to make their upward thrust seem exactly balanced by the downward pressure of the roof and entablature.<sup>4</sup> This gives the effect of repose. Therefore we feel that

<sup>4</sup> It is now definitely known that the Greeks did not arrive at this exact proportioning by accident, but that they very consciously aimed at it when designing their temples.

a Greek temple, however simple its outline may be, is a thing of beauty. Moreover, as we continue to study the picture, we realize that the effect of repose combined with the simplicity of lines gives the temple dignity and the look of permanence. And finally, if we compare this picture with those of other Greek temples, we discover that though they may differ in minor respects—some, for instance, being Doric, some Ionic, some Corinthian—the larger aspects of their design are the same. Thus they seem to represent a type capable of variation within itself, but not to be discarded—consequently a type which became traditional. And thus we are made to feel that in adhering to type, the Greeks were seeking the universal in beauty rather than the particular.

Now these things which we have observed in Greek temple architecture—harmony, proportion, repose, dignity, simplicity, the pursuit of permanence and universality—are generally accepted as manifestations of the classical spirit. The American artist, Kenyon Cox, had those qualities in mind when he wrote this:

The Classic Spirit is the disinterested search for perfection; it is the love of clearness and reasonableness and self-control; it is, above all, the love of permanence and of continuity. It asks of a work of art, not that it shall be novel or effective, but that it shall be fine and noble. It seeks not merely to express individuality or emotion but to express disciplined emotion and individuality restrained by law. It strives for the essential rather than the accidental, the eternal rather than the momentary—loves impersonality more than personality, and feels more power in the orderly succession of the hours and the seasons than in the violence of earthquake or

storm. And it loves to steep itself in tradition. It would have each new work connect itself in the mind of him who sees it with all the noble and lovely works of the past, bringing them to his memory and making their beauty and charm a part of the beauty and charm of the work before him. It does not deny originality and individuality—they are as welcome as inevitable. It does not consider tradition as immutable or set rigid bounds to invention. But it desires that each new presentation of truth and beauty shall show us the old truth and the old beauty, seen only from a different angle and colored by a different medium. It wishes to add link by link to the chain of tradition, but it does not wish to break the chain.<sup>5</sup>

When we read works of literature inspired by the classical spirit, we find the same characteristics which are present in the Greek temple architecture. And we soon perceive that classical literature shows not only a balanced and proportioned adjustment of words and phrases but also a careful maintenance of proportion between the emotion which a given subject is capable of arousing and the expression of that emotion. In other words, the expression is neither too florid nor too cold. The effectiveness of classical proportion can be illustrated by quoting some verses from the Greek poet, Simonides. Though we read them in translation, we can still recognize a delicate adjustment of words and phrases, and we feel that the expression of emotion is measured to accord perfectly with the emotion itself. These verses have to do with an old mythical story. King Acrisius had a daughter, Danaë, and she had a son

<sup>5</sup> Kenyon Cox, *The Classic Point of View*. New York (Charles Scribner's Sons), 1917, p. 3.

named Perseus. Fearing a prophecy that his grandson would bring about his death, Acrisius caused Danaë and Perseus to be shut up in a chest and cast into the sea. Their plight is pictured thus:

When, in the carven chest,  
 The winds that blew and waves in wild unrest  
 Smote her with fear, she, not with cheeks unwet,  
 Her arms of love round Perseus set,  
 And said: "O child, what grief is mine!  
 But thou dost slumber, and thy baby breast  
 Is sunk in rest,  
 Here in the cheerless brass-bound bark,  
 Tossed amid starless night and pitchy dark.  
 Nor dost thou heed the scudding brine  
 Of waves that wash above thy curls so deep,  
 Nor the shrill winds that sweep,—  
 Lapped in thy purple robe's embrace,  
 Fair little face!  
 But if this dread were dreadful too to thee,  
 Then wouldst thou lend thy listening ear to me;  
 Therefore I cry, Sleep, babe, and sea, be still,  
 And slumber our unmeasured ill!  
 Oh, may some change of fate, sire Zeus, from thee  
 Descend, our woes to end!  
 But if this prayer, too overbold, offend  
 Thy justice, yet be merciful to me." <sup>6</sup>

These verses from Simonides display an emotion, measured to be sure, but nevertheless intense and profound; and they exemplify the classical way of expressing emotion as well, perhaps, as any single selection can.

<sup>6</sup> The translation is by J. A. Symonds. For a fuller account of this myth, see Arthur Fairbanks, *The Mythology of Greece and Rome*. New York (D. Appleton-Century Company), 1908, pp. 263 ff., where the lines from Simonides are quoted.

They also illustrate the kind of creative imagination which we find in classical literature. They do not offer us whimsical flights of imagination, nor do they waft us into a fairyland where strangeness is wedded to beauty. They do something very different—something indeed more difficult and indeed more truly creative. Although Simonides starts with a story almost fantastic in its improbability, he ends by making us imagine the presence of universal motherhood. No mother may ever have actually experienced what Danaë experienced, but all mothers could feel as Danaë felt. The creative imagination of the classical poet has enabled him to take what is particular and improbable and produce the illusion of what is universal and true. And here we find another quality of true classicism exemplified. To make the point clear, however, we must turn to Aristotle's use of the word *imitation*; and the study of what Aristotle meant by *imitation* will be our transition to the study of pseudo-classicism.

When Aristotle used the term *imitation* in his *Poetics*, he did not mean slavish copying. On the contrary, he meant the suggesting of the general or universal. When we speak of *a man*, something definite and tangible is presented. When we speak of *man*, however, such is not the case. Men are individually and concretely real; man is an abstraction. When we use the word *man*, we mean something general—the sum total of those qualities common to particular men. Likewise *beauty* is a kind of generalization, an abstraction which has no tangible existence. Beauty may be evident to us in many forms; we speak of a beautiful flower, or a beautiful lake, or a

What  
Aristotle  
Meant by  
*Imitation*



beautiful woman. In themselves those forms are different; no one would mistake a flower for a lake, or a lake for a woman. But our language proves that we often recognize in divers individual objects certain common characteristics, because, for instance, we call the flower, the lake, and the woman—all three—beautiful. And that is why we speak of one object in terms of another which has the same quality if we wish to attract attention to the presence of that quality, as when Burns says, "My luve is like a red, red rose." The intangible One contained in the tangible Many we call *beauty*. Now just as Aristotle's *imitation* does not mean the copying of models in literature or art, it likewise does not mean the exact copying of nature in the manner of a photograph. To imitate in the Aristotelian sense is to copy particular objects in nature or particular situations and people in life in such a way as to suggest the universal qualities present in the objects or the universal truths exemplified by the situations and the people. We have seen that kind of imitation illustrated in the verses from Simonides, who died nearly a hundred years before Aristotle was born and therefore could not have been guided by Aristotle's statements. As we have seen, Simonides pictured one particular mother in a situation which aroused her anxiety and pity for her child, and he did it in such a way that he suggested a universal emotion of anxious pity—an emotion which any mother would feel if her child were placed in any kind of dangerous situation. And Sophocles illustrates the same method of imitating in his *Oedipus the King*. He presents the story of Oedipus *a man*, but he does it in such a way that he suggests the tragic aspects of human destiny. *Oedipus*

*the King* affects us as the tragic story of *man* rather than as the tragic story of *a man*. Such imitation—the suggesting of universals characteristic of classical literature—is certainly more difficult than facsimile reproduction of natural objects, of particular situations, and of definite characters. To raise a literary work above the plane of mere facsimile reproduction and give it the mysterious power of suggesting universal truth the writer must exercise creative imagination of the highest order.

The pseudo-classicists either misunderstood what Aristotle meant by imitation, or, understanding him, failed to follow him. Where the true classicists strove to copy nature so as to suggest universal truth, the pseudo-classicists obeyed rules and copied models. In so doing, they reproduced those qualities in the classical literature which to them were most apparent. They recognized the proportion and balance of the classics so far as form is concerned, and they copied those qualities well; but they do not seem to have mastered the ability to copy the nice proportioning of emotion and expression of emotion peculiar to their classical models. At any rate, pseudo-classical literature seems deficient in emotional power. Moreover, disregarding or misunderstanding the nature of the creative imagination which produced the classical masterpieces, they were inclined to depreciate all imagination and to stress the restraining element which enters into judgment. As a result, their virtues are likely to be negative rather than positive, and their work, as a whole, lacks imagination. In the final analysis, we may say that although the productions

Character-  
istics of  
Pseudo-  
classical  
Literature.

of the pseudo-classicists are not without merit, they are superficially rather than intrinsically classical.

One of the notable English pseudo-classical writings is Pope's *Essay on Man*. When Pope tells us why he elected to write his essay in verse instead of prose, he gives us indirectly a fairly good summary of the principles of pseudo-classicism. He says:

This I might have done in prose; but I chose verse and even rhyme, for two reasons. The one will appear obvious; that principles, maxims, or precepts, so written, both strike the reader more strongly at first, and are more easily retained by him afterwards; the other may seem odd, but it is true: I found I could express them more shortly this way than in prose itself; and nothing is more certain than that much of the force as well as grace of arguments or instructions depends on their conciseness. I was unable to treat this part of my subject more in detail without becoming dry and tedious; or more poetically without sacrificing perspicuity to ornament, without wandering from the precision, or breaking the chain of reasoning.<sup>7</sup>

Then Pope felt, according to his own statement, that the reader could remember *principles*, *maxims*, and *precepts* better if they were presented in verse, and he believed that for him at least verse was the better medium in which to show *force and grace of argument*, *conciseness*, *perspicuity*, and *an unbroken chain of reasoning*. Most people would have argued that verse is the better medium through which to stir the emotions and fire the imagination. Most people, in other words, would have

<sup>7</sup> Prefixed to the *Essay on Man*.

chosen verse not for the reasons which Pope gave, but for the very reasons which he ignored. Clearly Pope was little concerned with imagination and emotion. Any poem conceived according to Pope's statement could well bear the title of *essay*, and in the poem to which his explanation is prefaced he undoubtedly accomplished just what he set out to do. Here is a representative passage:

Heav'n from all creatures hides the book of Fate,  
 All but the page prescribed, their present state:  
 From brutes what men, from men what spirits know;  
 Or who would suffer being here below?  
 The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed to-day,  
 Had he thy reason, would he skip and play?  
 Pleas'd to the last he crops the flowery food,  
 And licks the hand just rais'd to shed his blood  
 O blindness to the future! kindly giv'n,  
 That each may fill the circle mark'd by Heav'n;  
 Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,  
 A hero perish or a sparrow fall,  
 Atoms or systems into ruin hurl'd,  
 And now a bubble burst, and now a world.  
 Hope humbly then; with trembling pinions soar;  
 Wait the great teacher Death, and God adore.  
 What future bliss He gives not thee to know,  
 But gives that hope to be thy blessing now.  
 Hope springs eternal in the human breast:  
 Man never is, but always to be, blest.

So far as form is concerned, these lines are well-nigh perfect. In the balancing of words and phrases, in clarity of expression, and in polish, they meet the requirements of true classicism. In other respects, they

fall short. They do show imagination of a kind, but it is not the kind which we see in the great masterpieces of truly classical literature. Pope does not forcefully bring home a truth to us by leading up to the universal in some original way. Instead, he starts with a statement of universal truth—the fact that all creatures are ignorant of what the future has in store for them—and illustrates his assertion of the truism by specific references. What he does is the exact opposite of what we saw in Simonides and in Sophocles. He has not imitated a truth; he has simply stated it. Besides, we feel little emotion in reading Pope's lines. He does not measure his expression of emotion so as to arouse the amount of emotion which his subject is capable of arousing. The thought that man must move forward blindly to his fate is a thought capable of stirring us to the depths, but Pope has uttered it in such a way that we remain almost unmoved; and the same thing may be said of the manner in which he deals with hope. Such deficiencies as we have noted in this selection from the *Essay on Man* are, by and large, the deficiencies of pseudo-classicism.

The pseudo-classical writers appear to least advantage in poetry, but even if we study them entirely from the point of view of poetry—and to do that would be unfair—we shall see that in spite of their failings much of what they produced has great merit. Besides, in imposing restraints upon the vagaries of thought and language in the literature which immediately preceded them, they did us a very real service. Their work reflects the interest in city life and in human nature characteristic of the age

Merits  
of the  
Pseudo-  
classical  
Writers.

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in which they flourished; and if we study that work as a product of its age, we shall be amply repaid for the effort.

In summing up, we may say that "*classicism*" stands for the qualities which are born of the classical spirit; namely, balance, harmony, simplicity, clarity of thought, the correct measuring of the expression of emotion to suit the emotion which should

Summary. *be aroused, and the kind of creative imagination which seeks to suggest universal truths. And we may say that "pseudo-classicism" stands for those qualities which result from the copying of models and the application of rules. We may also add that true classicism is exemplified in most of the great literature of Greece and Rome and occasionally in modern literature; and that pseudo-classicism flourished, so far as English literature is concerned, chiefly in the eighteenth century.*

### QUESTIONS

1. In what two senses may the word *classic* be used when we are referring to books? 2. In what two senses can the *Odyssey* be called a classic? 3. In what sense can Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* be called a classic? 4. What does the term *pseudo-classicism* mean? 5. What manifestations of the classical spirit appear in the Greek temple architecture? 6. How would you describe the classical spirit? 7. How do the verses quoted from Simonides on page 85 exemplify the true classical spirit? 8. What did Aristotle mean by "imitation"? 9. What are some of the traits of pseudo-classicism? 10. In what ways does pseudo-classicism differ from true classicism? 11. What are the chief faults of pseudo-classicism? 12. What benefits did the pseudo-classical writers confer upon our literature?

# EXERCISES

1. Show to what extent the following definition agrees with our own conclusions, and, if possible, name some modern book or poem which, in your opinion, shows some of the traits enumerated:

The classical "ideal" is predominantly an intellectual one. The products are characterized by clearness of thought, by completeness and symmetry, by harmonious proportion, by simplicity and repose. Classical works, whether musical or literary, are positive, clear, finished.<sup>8</sup>

2. Here is a passage, dealing with a certain kind of architecture:

We see a pillar, we conceive it as erected to support something. We know the nature of stone and its strength. If the proportions are so managed that we conceive the thing to be supported will fall, it gives us the idea of weakness and frailty, which is unpleasant; if they are such as to indicate a much greater degree of strength than is wanted, then we are equally displeased. Between these two extremes all proportions are naturally of an equal beauty.<sup>9</sup>

What kind of architecture does this suggest? What effect is produced on us when we behold a structure in which the pillars seem neither too strong nor too weak? State briefly in your own words the meaning of the passage. To what extent could your statement be applied to classical literature?

3. Mr. Conrad Aiken in his essay "The New American Poetry" has this to say about training in the classics:

. . . if too severe a training in the classics unfits one somewhat for bold experiment, too little of it is likely, on the other hand, to leave

<sup>8</sup> J. C. Fillmore, *Pianoforte Music*. Philadelphia (Theodore Presser Company), p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> T. Francis Bumpus, *A Guide to Gothic Architecture*. New York (Dodd, Mead and Company), 1914, p. 4.

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one with an aesthetic perceptiveness, a sensibility, in short, relatively rudimentary.<sup>10</sup>

In what sense does Mr. Aiken employ the word *classics*? Comment on Mr. Aiken's statement, showing why a "too severe training in the classics" might "unfit one for bold experiment," and why too little of such study is likely to leave one with "an aesthetic perceptiveness . . . relatively rudimentary."

4. In "Wordsworth's Grave" William Watson thus characterizes the pseudo-classical poetry in vogue before Wordsworth came to manhood:

A hundred years ere he to manhood came,  
Song from celestial heights had wandered down,  
Put off her robe of sunlight, dew, and flame,  
And donned a modish dress to charm the Town.  
  
Thenceforth she but festooned the porch of things;  
Apt at life's lore, incurious what life meant.  
Dextrous of hand, she struck her lute's few strings;  
Ignobly perfect, barrenly content.  
  
Unflushed with ardour and unblanched with awe,  
Her lips in profitless derision curled,  
She saw with dull emotion—if she saw—  
The vision of the glory of the world.  
  
The human masque she watched, with dreamless eyes  
In whose clear shadows lurked no trembling shade:  
The stars, unkennd by her, might set and rise,  
Unmarked by her, the daisies bloom and fade.<sup>11</sup>

What traits of pseudo-classicism are pointed out here? Pick out the specific phrases which make you think of them. Does this criticism seem just or unjust? In what respects?

<sup>10</sup> In Harold E. Stearns, *Civilization in the United States*. New York (Harcourt, Brace and Company), 1922, p. 219.

<sup>11</sup> William Watson, *Wordsworth's Grave and Other Poems*. New York (Friedrick A. Stokes Company), 1892, p. 15.



## CHAPTER VI

### ROMANTICISM

THE word *romance* which is connected ultimately with *Romanus*, the Latin for *Roman*, was frequently used by medieval writers when they were referring to the early dialects of French, which were derived, of course, from Latin. The fourteenth-century writer, Robert of Brunne, says:

The Terms  
*Romance*  
and  
*Romantic*.

Frankysche speche ys called Romaunce,  
So say this clerkes & men of Fraunce.

But since so many early stories were written in those dialects, the name *romance* was transferred to the stories and they were called *romances*. Then, apparently because the most prominent elements in many of the stories were love, heroism, and adventure, such things became associated with the word *romance*. Therefore we now use *romance* and *romantic* in connection with things which are fictitious, fanciful, or related to love and adventure, and of things which give the impression of strangeness, mystery, or wonder, since adventure often leads to what is strange, mysterious, or wondrous. Whenever we find such things, be it in art, architecture, music, or literature, we feel the presence of the romantic spirit.

The term *romanticism*, however, is more troublesome. Broadly speaking, romanticism stands for those qualities

which result from the activity of the romantic spirit; but we ordinarily use the word when referring to a particular movement in literature and the arts which, to state the case approximately, began in English literature with Blake. The qualities peculiar to romanticism, if we take the word in its broader meaning, are to be found in all ages. The qualities which characterize romanticism, when we use the word in its restricted and technical meaning, may have appeared here and there in all ages; nevertheless, they are most pronounced in the literature produced towards the close of the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth. We shall not attempt any exhaustive or deeply philosophical study of romanticism, but we must try to distinguish between the two kinds which we have mentioned and call attention to some of the results caused by the working of the romantic spirit in English literature. Let us turn first to the romanticism which belongs to all ages.

Although we usually think of Greek literature as classical in spirit because, on the whole, when contrasted with modern literature, it exhibits in larger proportion those qualities which we call classical, Greek literature none the less shows the working of the romantic spirit. In many respects the *Odyssey* exemplifies romanticism. We can illustrate that fact no better than by borrowing the words of Professor Neilson:

One has only to recall for a moment the nature of the adventures of Ulysses to call up the images of Circe and Calypso, of Polyphemus and Cyclops, of Nausicaä, of Scylla and Charybdis, of the Great scene of the slaying of the

suitors at the close, to realize that the poem is as truly a romance of adventure as *Gawain and the Green Knight*, or *Treasure Island*.<sup>1</sup>

And the sense of mystery and wonder so consistently identified with romanticism may be found even in the *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles. Warned by a celestial voice, Oedipus bids farewell to his companions and goes alone with Theseus into the grove of Colonus, where death is to end his sufferings. A messenger describes the scene in words which show "wonder joined with beauty" and a "suddenly appearing awe of the other world":

We beheld

The man—nay we beheld him not again,  
But Theseus only, with one hand upraised  
As if to shade his eyes before some fear,  
Fallen strangely, seen, and not to be endured.<sup>2</sup>

And the love element in romanticism finds ample expression in classical literature. The episode of Dido in the *Aeneid* comes straightway to our minds as a typical illustration. Let us examine a brief passage from Virgil's account of Dido; and to make sure that the translator has not given it a romantic coloring not present in the original, let us select the translation of Dryden, a poet in the classical tradition:

When day declines, and feasts renew the night,  
Still on his face she feeds her famish'd sight;

<sup>1</sup> W. A. Neilson, *Essentials of Poetry*. Boston and New York (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1912, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> See page x of the Introduction to Vol. VIII of Paul Elmer More, *Shelburne Essays* (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1913.

She longs again to hear the prince relate  
 His own adventures and the Trojan fate.  
 He tells it o'er and o'er; but still in vain,  
 For still she begs to hear it once again.  
 The hearer on the speaker's mouth depends,  
 And thus the tragic story never ends.

Then, when they part, when Phoebe's paler light  
 Withdraws, and falling stars to sleep invite,  
 She last remains, when ev'ry guest is gone,  
 Sits on the bed he press'd, and sighs alone;  
 Absent, her absent hero sees and hears;  
 Or in her bosom young Ascanius bears,  
 And seeks the father's image in the child,  
 If love by likeness might be so beguil'd.<sup>3</sup>

Though romanticism was clearly present in the literature of Greece and Rome, its presence there was for the most part exceptional. In the Middle Ages, however, it became dominant. The romantic spirit together with the spirit of Christianity gave us the cathedral architecture of the Middle Ages. And we must remember that Christianity need not be at odds with romanticism of the finer type, for the Christian life is a noble adventure. The Gothic<sup>4</sup> cathedral can show us the working of the romantic spirit just as the Greek temple showed us the manifestation of the classical spirit. When we look at a

Medieval  
 Roman-  
 ticism.

<sup>3</sup> The romantic story of Dido also appears in Ovid, from whom Dryden translated it in his *Dido to Aeneas*.

<sup>4</sup> The word *Gothic* is really a misnomer. In the eighteenth century the Middle Ages were considered barbarous; and since the Goths were thought of as barbarians, things medieval which had no direct connection with the Goths came to be called Gothic. This was true of the cathedral architecture and also of novels which had a medieval setting. Such novels as Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* were called "Gothic Romances."

Gothic cathedral, we see at once that it lacks the simplicity of the Greek temple. It does not give the effect of repose. Instead, it offers the suggestion of upward-striving movement. Its height, taken with the upward pointing of its spires and arches, produces the illusion of a force straining away from the earth as if the very stones were reaching for something above. Therefore these cathedrals fill the beholder with wonder and awe.

In the splendid cathedrals of the Middle Ages we see something symbolic of that same restless pursuit of adventure combined with the seeking of the ideal which finds expression in many beautiful and romantic stories dealing with the quest of the Holy Grail. On the other hand, medieval romanticism in literature often sinks to the level of grossness. And in the vast middle ground between those two extremes there is a plenteous store of tales and poems filled with romance of the more usual type—tales and poems about heroes who wander through strange countries, fight hand-to-hand combats, and pay homage to maidens who are, each and all, the “fairest of women.” The interest in strangeness and mystery characteristic of romanticism is reflected, though clumsily indeed, in the wonders and marvels with which medieval literature is abundantly supplied. It shows itself more effectively, however, in the fantastic and often beautiful stories created by the Celtic imagination—stories which introduce us into a dreamland peopled by magicians, elves, and pixies. And once and again, we find ourselves in the presence of sheer wonder, something closely akin to that of the supernatural which we felt in the lines from Sophocles. When we read *The*

*Pearl*, one of the finest of all medieval poems, we experience the emotion of sheer wonder. We feel it, for example, where the poem tells of "streaming stars" which "glitter from the sky in the winter night."

This romantic spirit which was not idle in the days of the Greeks and Romans and which was conspicuously active in the Middle Ages has continued at work down to the present day. In certain periods it has influenced writers more strongly than in others, but its influence has never vanished entirely. To trace its course in detail falls within the province of the historian of literature and is not a part of our present task. We may say, however, that it was probably the most important of the forces exerted upon Elizabethan literature despite the fact that the influence of the classical spirit was already becoming strong. Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, for instance, is typically romantic; and although there were classical elements in Shakespeare's work, his plays belong, as a whole, to the romantic drama. With the coming of Milton and Dryden, the power of the romantic spirit lessened; and in the first half of the eighteenth century, when the pseudo-classicists held sway, we find little romantic literature of any consequence in England. At that time, romanticism survived chiefly in the ballads and in Scottish literature. In the second part of the eighteenth century, however, we note a quickening of the romantic spirit, which marked the beginning of what is usually called the Romantic Movement.

In the Romantic Movement we find both the qualities of that romanticism which is present in all ages and other qualities which we have yet to study. With the

coming of the new movement the stream of romanticism which had dwindled thin in the days of the pseudo-classicists swelled rapidly into full spate. The good old romantic themes of extravagant love, heroism, and adventure came back into their own in English literature. But a number of new qualities also began to have importance; therefore the Romantic Movement exhibits a complicated mixture of old and new characteristics. The newer characteristics, which we have not yet studied, came into being when a reaction against pseudo-classicism went to extremes.

Historically the Romantic Movement was a revolt against pseudo-classicism and especially against Pope. Signs of a revolt appeared early. In 1759 Edward Young published an important essay entitled "Conjectures on Original Composition in a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison." It contains many statements which show that Young was not in sympathy with the restraints imposed by pseudo-classicism. In the following passage Professor Beers has collected a number of Young's pertinent remarks:

The less we copy the renowned ancients, we shall resemble them the more. . . . Learning . . . is a great lover of rules and boaster of famed examples . . . and sets rigid bounds to that liberty to which genius owes its supreme glory. . . . Born *originals*, how often it comes to pass that we die *copies*. . . . Let not great examples or authorities browbeat thy reason into too great a diffidence of thyself.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Henry A. Beers, *A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century*. New York (Henry Holt and Company), 1899, p. 388.

These words, of course, strike at the pseudo-classicists in general, but to show that Young had Pope very much in mind, let us quote a paragraph from Young's essay itself:

Though Pope's noble muse may boast her illustrious descent from Homer, Virgil, and Horace, yet is an original author more nobly born. As Tacitus says of Curtius Rufus, an original author is born of himself, is his own progenitor, and will probably propagate a numerous offspring of imitators, to eternize his glory; while mule-like imitators die without issue. Therefore, though we stand much obliged for his giving us a Homer, yet had he [Pope] doubled our obligation by giving us—a Pope. Had he a strong imagination and the true sublime? That granted, we might have had two Homers instead of one, if longer had been his life; for I heard the dying swan talk over an epic plan a few weeks before his decease.<sup>6</sup>

And this rebellion against the restraining influences of rules continues well into the nineteenth century. In "Sleep and Poetry," a poem included in the volume published by Keats in 1817, we find these lines which are clearly aimed at the pseudo-classicists:

. . . beauty was awake!  
Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead  
To things ye knew not of,—were closely wed  
To musty laws lined out with wretched rule  
And compass vile: so that ye taught a school  
Of dolts to smooth, inlay, and clip, and fit,  
Till, like the certain wands of Jacob's wit,  
Their verses tallied.

<sup>6</sup> M. W. Steinke, *Edward Young's "Conjectures on Original Composition" in England and Germany*. New York (Longmans, Green and Company), 1917, p. 61.



Moreover, Young's cry for originality was but the forerunner of the later demand for spontaneity in literature. In a letter written in 1818, Keats shows impatience with restraint in poetry and his belief in the need for spontaneity. Let us italicize the words which particularly show what he was thinking. He is speaking of poetry when he says:

Its touches of Beauty *should never be half way* thereby making the reader *breathless instead of content*: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the sun *come natural to him* [the poet]—shine over him and set soberly although in magnificence leaving him in the luxury of twilight—but it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it—and this leads me to another axiom, That if Poetry comes not *naturally as the Leaves to a tree* it had better not come at all.<sup>7</sup>

Rebelling against pseudo-classicism, many writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries turned to romanticism. Naturally they were attracted to the

Interest in the Middle Ages. Middle Ages, a period in which the romantic spirit had been markedly active. Doubtless some students of the Romantic Movement have given this return to the Middle Ages for literary forms and materials too much prominence; nevertheless, its importance cannot be denied. Medieval settings were given to many stories; but what concerns us chiefly here is that the enthusiasm for the Middle Ages caused a renewal of interest in themes of chivalrous love, heroism, and adventure. Thus in novels

<sup>7</sup> *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. M. B. Forman (Oxford University Press), 1931, I, 116.

like Scott's *Quentin Durward* we see the return of universal romanticism.

And this interest in the Middle Ages was caused partly by the fact that they were remote. The pursuit of what is remote in space or time results directly from the desire for adventure and is therefore characteristic of romanticism. And here we should note a rather curious fact. The very revolt which produced the Romantic Movement in some cases brought back something akin to true classicism. If a writer were to look back longingly to the distant Middle Ages, why could he not look back even further to the still more remote times of the Greeks and Romans? And if freedom from the restraints of pseudo-classicism permitted the romantic spirit to influence a writer, would not the same freedom allow the true classical spirit to affect him as well? Some of the romantic writers did look back beyond the Middle Ages, and some were influenced by the classical spirit as well as by the romantic. Keats in his odes may be regarded as classical, not in the narrow sense of imitating Greek models, though he was deeply and consciously influenced by them, but as having the true classical spirit adapted to modern life. In his odes he shows the same kind of creative imagination which we saw in the verses from Simonides. We see it in this stanza from the "Ode on a Grecian Urn":

Reappear-  
ance of  
True  
Classicism.

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
 Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;  
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
 Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

In telling us that love, youth, and beauty abide forever with the unliving, motionless figures wrought upon the urn, Keats tells us indirectly that all such things are transient in the case of living men and women. Thus in describing those particular figures on a particular urn, he suggests a universal truth. Creative imagination of that kind is in the true sense classical.

We see then that the rebellion against pseudo-classicism brought universal romanticism back into a position of more than normal prominence, and that it resulted here and there in works strongly reminiscent of true classicism. Since in all movements of revolt there is likely to be exaggeration, we can expect to find exaggeration in the Romantic Movement. Frequently these revolters went to extremes.

Their treatment of the heroic couplet,<sup>8</sup> for example, illustrates not only the fact that they demanded freedom in the use of verse forms, but also the fact that they often allowed freedom to run into license. They liberated English verse from the dominance of the couplet, bringing back many verse patterns which had been used by the Elizabethans. And when they did write in the couplet, they loosened

Freedom  
Breeds  
License.

Treatment of  
the Heroic  
Couplet.

<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of the heroic couplet, see p. 224.

it, discarding the strait-laced form which it had assumed in the hands of Pope and his imitators. All that was a good thing, but in some cases these romantic writers went too far. The license with which they were often inclined to treat the Popian couplet may be seen in these lines from "Endymion," one of Keats's immature poems:

Yet must I be a coward!—Honor rushes  
Too palpable before me—the sad look  
Of Jove—Minerva's start—no bosom shook  
With awe of purity—no Cupid pinion  
In reverence veiled—my crystalline dominion  
Half lost, and all old hymns made nullity!

Here end-stopping<sup>9</sup> entirely disappears; consequently the thought in each line runs on so regularly into the following line that we lose all feeling for the couplet. This is not the freedom which comes from mastery—from the ability to express thought freely within the limitations imposed by the metrical form as Shakespeare could express it. This, on the contrary, is license. And the kind of thing which this passage exemplifies leads naturally to free verse and polyphonic prose.

But the revolvers also went to extremes in other aspects of their work, and in overshooting the mark they often gave their writings particular qualities not universally typical of romantic literature. The presence of these peculiar qualities made the Romantic Movement something more than a mere rebirth of the old romanticism.

Contempt for restraint led to a glorification of un-

<sup>9</sup> For an explanation of end-stopping, see p. 217.

restrained emotions, and, as a result, the new romantic writers were inclined to voice their feelings with exaggerated intensity. Where the pseudo-classicists missed true proportion by failing adequately to express the amount of emotion which the given thought was capable of arousing, the revolting romanticists were likely to do the reverse by permitting their expression to become unduly exaggerated. Just such extreme intensity appears in the concluding stanza of Shelley's "The Indian Serenade":

Unrestrained  
Emotion.

Oh, lift me from the grass!  
I die! I faint! I fail!  
Let thy love in kisses rain  
On my lips and eyelids pale.  
My cheek is cold and white, alas!  
My heart beats loud and fast,  
Oh! press it close to thine again,  
Where it will break at last.

And glorification of the emotions had other and more important effects. It has been said of these romanticists that "they conceived of the world as a living unity, as an organism each member of which mirrored the whole." And having such a belief, they were constantly obsessed by a longing to feel themselves at one with the other parts of the world to which they belonged but from which, to the extent that they were individuals, they were separated. In other words, they wished to come into emotional communion with the world soul. Accordingly, for many of them religion resolved itself into a kind of "emotional contemplation of the universe." And to

Emotional  
Expansive-  
ness.

satisfy their vague and restless yearning, they often tried to send forth their souls in an expansive emotional ecstasy to mingle with nature, or God, or both, because they usually thought of God not as a spirit above and apart from nature, but as a spirit which manifested itself to them in or through nature. Out of this turmoil of unrestrained emotions came much confusion. The supernatural was confused with the natural, the ideal with the real, and often the spiritual with the fleshly. In the literary works that show the new ro-

Confusion of the Supernatural with the Natural.      manticism at its extreme we nearly always see one or more of these confusions exemplified.

Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" gives us a typical illustration of ecstatic reverie as well as the mixing of the supernatural with nature:

These beauteous forms,  
Through a long absence, have not been to me  
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:  
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,  
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;  
And passing even into my purer mind,  
With tranquil restoration:—feelings too  
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,  
As have no slight or trivial influence  
On that best portion of a good man's life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered acts  
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,  
To them I may have owed another gift,  
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,

In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,  
In which the affections gently lead us on,—  
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul:  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things.

Here, as we observe, the emotions, which Wordsworth calls the “affections,” lead the poet into a reverie which enables him to see the “life of things.” His individual spirit is coming into communion with the world spirit. Then he continues:

For I have learned  
To look on nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity,  
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

And in this second excerpt we see a mingling of the supernatural with nature. Clearly the "something far more deeply interfused," the spirit which "rolls through all things," is God. That the contemplation of nature should have drawn the poet's soul towards God does not appear to us as anything out of the ordinary. In nature men of all ages have found intimations of God's existence, and centuries before Wordsworth was born, the Psalmist voiced a universal thought when he sang:

The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.

But there is this difference. To the Psalmist God was a supernatural being distinct from the works of nature which he had created; according to Wordsworth God is "interfused" in nature, and consequently lost in nature. Wordsworth has mingled the supernatural with the natural.

Shelley's *Epipsychidion* shows confusion of the ideal with the real. In 1820, Shelley met Emilia Viviani, a young Italian lady who had been shut up in a convent by her father much against her will. The poet conceived a sympathy for her which quickly developed into an idealized love, and this experience inspired him to write his *Epipsychidion*. In the early part of the poem, Shelley addresses the young lady directly, uttering an emotion which is at least intelligible; but soon his unrestrained feelings overflow and we have this:

Confusion  
of the  
Ideal with  
the Real.

. . . the brightness  
Of her divinest presence trembles through  
Her limbs, as underneath a cloud of dew



Embodied in the windless heaven of June,  
Amid the splendor-wingèd stars, the Moon  
Burns, inextinguishably beautiful;  
And from her lips, as from a hyacinth full  
Of honey-dew, a liquid murmur drops,  
Killing the sense with passion, sweet as stops  
Of planetary music heard in trance.

Here Shelley confused the real woman, Emilia Viviani, with an ideal which had no existence outside his own imagination. Evidently he realized what he had done, for he said with reference to the poem:

It is an idealized history of my life and feelings. I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps, eternal.

The reader may feel that as Shelley progresses in his confusing of the real woman with his ideal, the emotion expressed in his description spreads out into unintelligible diffuseness; but we must not forget that the selections from his poetry cited here are offered merely as illustrations of romantic tendencies. To judge the whole work of a great poet like Shelley by samples thus chosen would be entirely unjust. Indeed he himself was aware that most readers could never share the feelings expressed in *Epipsychidion*, for he gave instructions that it should be published "simply for the esoteric few."

Finally, emotional expansiveness resulted not infrequently in confusion of the spiritual with the fleshly. If the Divine is to be found in nature, where Words-

worth and so many others found or thought they found it, then love of the Divine and love of Nature come to be pretty much the same thing. And just as these romantic revolvers associated love of nature with love of God, so they came to believe that in love between the sexes there is something closely akin to divinity. It was a seemingly innocent doctrine, but the extremists among those who held to it often reasoned that love so glorified should be hampered by no restraints. As a consequence, the new romanticists sometimes permitted their idealized love to degenerate into gross sensuality. And one of them even longed to be in a remote wilderness where he could study philosophy with the courtesan, Lais, sitting by his side. Such often was the result of confusing the spiritual with the fleshly.

The passage which we have quoted from *Epipsy-chidion* also illustrated another characteristic of the new romantic literature in that it shows extreme subjectivity. The production of much subjective writing was the logical result of the revolt against pseudo-classical objectivity, but the new romantic writers are to be distinguished from the old not so much by the quantity of subjective work which they put forth as by the peculiar nature of their subjectivity. Confusing, as they so frequently did, the ideal with the real and the spiritual with the fleshly, the rebelling romanticists could not escape disillusion; and disillusioned, they often took delight in picturing themselves as sensitive and superior beings, neglected by mankind and misunderstood. Glorifying in their egotism, they then surrendered to morbid brood-

Confusion  
of the  
Spiritual  
with the  
Fleshly.

Extreme  
Subjectivity.

ing. When they expressed their morbid thoughts and feelings in what they wrote, their writings were characterized by melancholy and by a subjectivity as unhealthy as it was extreme. It was this morbid subjectivity which Matthew Arnold had in mind when he said that "Byron paraded his bleeding heart all over Europe," and we see it illustrated in these lines from Shelley's "Stanzas Written in Dejection Near Naples":

Some might lament that I were cold,  
As I when this sweet day is gone,  
Which my lost heart, too soon grown old,  
Insults with this untimely moan;  
They might lament—for I am one  
Whom men love not—and yet regret,  
Unlike this day, which, when the sun  
Shall on its stainless glory set,  
Will linger, though enjoyed, like joy in memory yet.

Such self-pity is indeed not present in the passage from *Epipsychidion*, but there nevertheless the subjectivity is extreme. In a preceding chapter we took note of Rousseau's assertion that he was different from other men, and we gave some attention to the more than normal subjectivity in *Epipsychidion*; however, inasmuch as the expression of extremely personal thoughts and feelings is present in so many of these new romantic works, we should again look briefly into the question of extreme subjectivity.

We have already observed that the sonnet which Milton wrote about his blindness—a piece of normally subjective writing—possesses universal appeal because the reader can imagine himself in Milton's place. When,

on the other hand, a work of literature becomes inordinately subjective, its universality of appeal is lost.

**Weakness  
of Extremely  
Subjective  
Work.** Therein lies the weakness of all such work and one of the weaknesses of the literary movement which so often gave free rein to the expression of extremely personal moods

and fancies rather than to the utterance of universal truths and emotions common to mankind. A comparison of *Epipsychidion* with Burns's "A Red Red Rose" will make the point clear. Almost everywhere in *Epipsychidion* Shelley voices emotions so peculiarly his own that few of us can put ourselves in his place and share them with him. Burns, however, could not have been expressing an exclusively personal emotion when he wrote "A Red Red Rose," for he reworked it out of an old song. Nevertheless, we can all put ourselves in his place and feel ourselves speaking these words with him:

My luve is like a red, red rose

That's newly sprung in June:

My luve is like the melodie

That's sweetly played in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonny lass,

So deep in luve am I;

That I will luve thee still, my dear,

Till a' the seas gang dry;

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,

And the rocks melt with the sun;

I will luve thee still, my dear,

While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only luve!

And fare thee weel awhile!

And I will come again, my love!  
Tho' 'twere ten thousand mile!

And in *Epipsychidion* we see the presence of still one more quality which, to a considerable extent, is characteristic of the new romantic literature. The revolt against pseudo-classical sterility of imagination caused the imaginative element to become markedly prominent in the writings of the Romantic Movement. But the revolters were not content with simply emphasizing imagination. Again they went to extremes and began to glorify unrestrained imagination just as they glorified unrestrained emotion and individual temperament. As a result, imagination often passes over into fantasy and grotesqueness. In *Epipsychidion*, for example, Shelley compares Emilia Viviani to a star, and to a lute, and says that he measures the "world of fancies," seeking one like her. Then he arrives at this grotesque comparison:

An antelope,  
In the suspended impulse of its lightness,  
Were less ethereally light.

And even when Shelley is not indulging in grotesque metaphors, he is depicting scenes and characters far removed from ordinary human experience. In all ages romantic fairy tales and ghost stories have dealt with beings which have no actual existence. But although such stories give the impression of strangeness, they are not so strange as one might at first suspect, for the idea of ghosts and fairies is universally familiar. In the works with which we are now concerned, however, de-

scriptions of unearthly and intangible scenes and people are often presented so very subjectively that the reader is drawn away from all universal concepts with which he is familiar. Since those pictures cannot possibly arouse universal emotions, their appeal must necessarily come from the beauty which they may possess in themselves.

The tendency to let the imagination turn into reverie and the predilection for imagined pictures of the kind just mentioned began to crop out at the very beginning of the revolt. As early as 1787, Rousseau wrote to the Bailli de Mirabeau as follows:

Aimless  
Revery.

The fatigue of thinking becomes every day more painful to me. I love to dream, but freely, allowing my mind to wander without enslaving myself to any subject. . . . This idle and contemplative life which you do not approve and which I do not excuse, becomes to me daily more delicious; to wander alone endlessly and ceaselessly among the trees and rocks about my dwelling, to muse or rather to be as irresponsible as I please, and as you say, to go wool-gathering; . . . finally to give myself up unconstrainedly to my fantasies which, thank heaven, are all within my power: that, sir, is for me the supreme enjoyment, than which I can imagine nothing superior in this world for a man at my age and in my condition.<sup>10</sup>

This is a statement significant in two ways. It describes a condition of things in which the imagination is left free to wander unhindered by the restraining element in judgment; and it shows an interest fixed not upon any

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Professor Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism*. Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1919, p. 75.

organic connection between images, but upon the separate fleeting images for themselves alone.

The writers of this period were much given to such revery, though they did not always carry it to a similar extreme. On the whole, the practice was dangerous, for constant surrender to revery encourages an attitude of passivity which leads to weakening of the will. We must admit, however, that some of the descriptions which have resulted from unrestrained imagining and hold so considerable a place in the new romantic literature have beauty and perhaps enduring value, though they are to be enjoyed solely for their own sake as pictures. One of the finest of those romantic writings which record mere fleeting pictures is Coleridge's fragmentary poem, "Kubla Khan."

Coleridge himself left us an interesting explanation of the genesis of "Kubla Khan":

"Kubla Khan." In the summer of 1797, the Author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farm-house between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in Purchas's "Pilgrimage": "Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall." The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all

the images rose up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awakening he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone had been cast, but, alas! without the after restoration of the latter.<sup>11</sup>

We see then that "Kubla Khan" originated in a dream.<sup>12</sup> Also we know that in dreams the flux of images and pictures is not subject to the will. When we dream, judgment neither guides nor restrains, for, as it has been neatly stated, in dreams "common sense is off duty." Accordingly, "Kubla Khan" must show the working of an imagination entirely freed from restraint:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree,

<sup>11</sup> From Coleridge's preface to "Kubla Khan."

<sup>12</sup> In perfection of rime and metrical workmanship the poem looks like a product of conscious artistry. Then could Coleridge have dreamed the form of his poem as well as its content? We may say if we please that he did, accepting Professor Lowes's tentative explanation that "any technique acquired through the conscious expenditure of time and labour . . . becomes in large degree, as everyone knows, unconscious in its exercise." But even if the metrical form was worked out consciously by Coleridge after he had awakened, there is no reason to doubt that the pictures which he presented were approximately the same as those which passed through his dream. See J. L. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*, p. 598.



Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man

Down to a sunless sea.

So twice five miles of fertile ground  
With walls and towers were girdled round;  
And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills,  
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;  
And here were forests ancient as the hills,  
Enfolding many sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted  
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!  
A savage place! as holy and enchanted  
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted  
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!  
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething  
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,  
A mighty fountain momently was forced;  
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst,  
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail;  
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever  
It flung up momently the sacred river.

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion,  
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,  
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,  
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:  
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far  
Ancestral voices prophesying war!

The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
Floated midway on the waves;  
Where was heard the mingled measure  
From the fountain and the caves.

It was a miracle of rare device,  
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

A damsel with a dulcimer  
In a vision once I saw:  
It was an Abyssinian maid,  
And on her dulcimer she played,  
Singing of Mount Abora.  
Could I revive within me  
Her symphony of song,  
To such a deep delight 'twould win me  
That with music loud and long,  
I would build that dome in air,  
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!  
And all who heard should see them there,  
And all should cry, "Beware! Beware!"  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise."

Surely the fleeting pictures caught from Coleridge's dream and recorded in "Kubla Khan" can be enjoyed for their beauty as mere pictures, but few of us would go so far as to agree with Swinburne that this is "perhaps the most beautiful of all poems." No work of literature which simply offers a series of pictures beautiful in themselves can take rank with the great masterpieces which suggest universal truths and stir universal emotions. What Coleridge would have made of his poem if he had not been interrupted by the man from Porlock no one can say. We should be safe, however, in surmising that he would have continued with a series of descriptions like those with which he began; the dream inception of the poem argues for such a supposition.

Since "Kubla Khan" had its origin in a dream, it shows the working of an imagination more than normally unrestrained; but the pictures it gives us are not unlike many others which the new romantic writers produced when they deliberately surrendered to reverie.

And now to conclude, we may say *that universal romanticism—the romanticism found in all ages—is characterized by such qualities as strangeness and wonder, predilection for the fictitious and the fanciful, and interest in themes of chivalrous love and adventure. And we may say that, broadly speaking, the Romantic Move-*

*ment was a revolt against pseudo-classicism*  
Summary. —*a revolt which caused a tremendous revival of interest in universal romance, and which when carried to extremes, resulted in a contempt for restraint that gave the following distinctive characteristics to much of the nineteenth-century romantic literature: a tendency towards license in the treatment of verse forms; a glorification of unrestrained emotion, which produced at times an exaggerated intensity in the expression of feeling and at other times an emotional expansiveness which caused confusion of the supernatural with the natural, the ideal with the real, and the spiritual with the fleshly; a glorification of individual temperament, which showed itself in an extreme subjectivity sometimes morbid and melancholy; and a glorification of unrestrained imagination which led to aimless reverie and fondness for fleeting pictures often beautiful but to be enjoyed for themselves alone as mere pictures.*

## QUESTIONS

1. What was the origin of the word *romance*? 2. What does the term usually connote today? 3. In what two different senses may the term *romanticism* be used? 4. What elements of romance may be found in the ancient classical literatures? 5. How does the architecture of the medieval cathedrals reveal the working of the romantic spirit? 6. How does the romanticism of the Romantic Movement differ in general from the romance common to all ages? 7. What relation did the Romantic Movement bear to pseudo-classicism? 8. What was the attitude of the new romantics toward the Middle Ages? 9. How did the Romantic Movement bring back something akin to true classicism? 10. In what ways did the romantic revolvers go to extremes? 11. How did they tend to treat the heroic couplet? 12. What resulted from romantic contempt for restraint? 13. What is meant by "emotional expansiveness"? 14. What great romantic poem illustrates the tendency to confuse the supernatural with the natural? 15. What is the weakness of poems like Shelley's *Epipsychidion*? 16. How did the romantics come to confuse the spiritual with the fleshly? 17. What fault can you find with the extreme subjectivity often present in works of romantic literature? 18. To what did indulgence in unrestrained imagination lead? 19. What is the danger in aimless reverie?

## EXERCISES

1. Criticize the following passage and then restate the gist of it as well as you can in your own words:

Romantic literature is that which joins a sense of mystery, wonder, and curiosity as well as individuality in form and thought, to ornamental language and technique; classic literature is that which joins a sense of self-control and poise, as well as conventionality in

form and thought, to clarity of language and technique. The romantic character in art consists in the addition of strangeness to beauty. The classic character in art consists in the addition of restraint and flawlessness to beauty. The essential element of the romantic spirit is curiosity joined to a love of beauty. Romantic poets are often at the mercy of their inspiration; classic poets are mostly the masters of their inspiration. Classic literature embodies the repose of the world; romantic literature the restlessness of the world. A classic work of art is like a Greek temple; it stands or falls by its perfect fitness in the relation of its parts to the whole; it is right as a whole and has due proportions as a whole. A romantic work of art is like a Gothic cathedral; it impresses not by its mass effect but by its detail and variety.<sup>13</sup>

2. Near the end of an essay entitled "Classical and Romantic," Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch sums up his conclusions thus:

I think, if you will look into "classicism" and "romanticism" for yourselves, with your own open eyes, you will find—though the whole pother about their difference amounts to nothing that need trouble a healthy man—it amounts to this: some men have naturally a sense of form stronger than their sense of color; some men have a sense of color stronger than their sense of form.

In proportion as they indulge their proclivities or neglect to discipline them, one man will be a classical, the other a romantic, writer. At their utmost, one will be a dull formalist, the other a frantic dauber. I truly believe there is not much more to be said.<sup>14</sup>

Would you say that the effort to distinguish between classicism and romanticism is "pother"? If so, why? If not, why not? What is the essential part of the above statement? Do you agree with it, or not? Why? Can you mention a classical work noteworthy for its "form"? Can you mention a romantic work noteworthy for its "color"? What

<sup>13</sup> Harko G. de Maar, *A History of Modern English Romanticism*. London, 1924, I, 12. By permission of and special arrangement with the Oxford University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Studies in Literature*. New York (G. P. Putnam's Sons), 1918, p. 93.

writer with whom you are familiar comes nearest to being a "dull formalist"? What writer of your acquaintance comes nearest to being a "frantic dauber"?

3. The quality which distinguishes the poetry of the beginning of the nineteenth century, the poetry which we can roughly group together as the romantic movement, is the quality of its imagination, and this quality is seen clearly as a kind of atmosphere, which adds strangeness to beauty.<sup>15</sup>

Do you agree with this, or not? Why? State in your own words what else you know about the quality of imagination exhibited in nineteenth-century romanticism.

4. Their romanticism was, as we have seen, *Seelenkultur*, a record of soul-experiences, a confessional statement of the life of the spirit, a blue-book and a blue-flower-book of secret communications with invisible realms, a poetic and philosophic ascension along the celestial stairway to Absolute Beauty. Their love for that beauty carried them steadily along onward and Godward to the Centre of all things. They could not stop very long on the way, just long enough to get fleeting impressions. For a comprehensive understanding of man's actions, laws, institutions, or society's aims, they had little time. Onward they hurried, and, seized with impatience, dreamed longingly of that far-away goal. Their style is wanting in patient labor, and their subject matter in terrestrial and social support.<sup>16</sup>

This extract has to do primarily with German romanticism. To what extent would it apply to nineteenth-century English romanticism as explained in this chapter. Discuss.

5. In reading this sonnet, remember that Wordsworth, who wrote it, was a poet of the Romantic Movement:

A Poet! He hath put his heart to school,  
Nor dares to move unpropped upon the staff

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Symons, *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*. New York (E. P. Dutton and Company), 1909, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Robert M. Wernae, *Romanticism and the Romantic School in Germany*. New York (D. Appleton-Century Company), 1910, p. 326.

Which Art hath lodged within his hand—must laugh  
By precept only, and shed tears by rule.  
Thy Art be Nature; the live current quaff,  
And let the groveller sip his stagnant pool,  
In fear that else, when Critics grave and cool  
Have killed him, Scorn should write his epitaph.  
How does the Meadow-flower its bloom unfold?  
Because the lovely little flower is free  
Down to the root, and, in that freedom bold;  
And so the grandeur of the Forest-tree  
Comes not by casting in a formal mould,  
But from its *own* divine vitality.

What contrast between pseudo-classicism and romanticism do you find here? In your own words state briefly the central idea in the sonnet.

6. Explain this and illustrate:

If I had to designate very briefly this underlying principle which gives to historic romance a character radically different from the mystery and wonder of classic art, I should define it as that expansive conceit of the emotions which goes with the illusion of beholding the infinite within the stream of nature itself instead of apart from the stream.<sup>17</sup>

7. In *The Return of the Native* Thomas Hardy describes Eustacia Vye thus:

Her presence brought memories of such things as Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical midnights; her moods recalled lotus-eaters and the march in "Athalie"; her motions, the ebb and flow of the sea; her voice, the viola.

Does this description suggest a romantic character? Why? If you have read *The Return of the Native*, argue that Eustacia was a Romantic. Do this by referring specifically to some of her actions, traits, and desires.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Elmer More, *Shelburne Essays*. Boston and New York (Houghton Mifflin Company), Vol. VIII (*The Drift of Romanticism*). See page xiii of the Introduction.

## CHAPTER VII

### IDEALISM

THE word *idealism* is connected with the familiar word *idea*. The Greek word *idea* was taken over by the Romans without change except that it was written in the letters of the Latin alphabet, and from the Latin it passed into English. But the Romans formed the corresponding adjective *idealis*, which meant *existing in idea*, and the Latin *idealis* gave us our word *ideal*, from which we have formed the word *idealism*.

The Term  
*Idealism*.

We usually think of an idea as something existing only in the mind. For example, when we were studying the classical imitation of universals, we saw that beauty is an intangible abstraction. It is the name we give to a certain quality possessed in common by all material objects which appear to us as beautiful. A beautiful flower is tangible and a beautiful lake is tangible, but their common quality which we call beauty is intangible. Since the flower and the lake are tangible, we think of them as having objective reality; and since the idea expressed by the term *beauty* is intangible, we think of it as lacking objective reality, or, in other words, as something imaginary in contrast to things which are objectively real. Consequently the derived adjective *ideal* is applied to things which are imaginary, and the derived noun *idealism*, when used in connection with literature, designates a tendency to depict things



in an imaginary way—not as they actually are, but as they are not. Thus *idealism* becomes an antonym for *realism*. Again, we often associate the quality of perfection with certain ideas. We think of beauty, for instance, as universal, eternal, and perfect in contrast to beautiful objects, which, as experience tells us, are transient, and which are beautiful to varying degrees. As a result, we use the term *ideal* to indicate things which are perfect, or, at least, the most nearly perfect of their kind. Thus we may speak of an ideal climate, meaning the most nearly perfect climate imaginable; or we may say that a person is a man of high ideals, meaning that his standards of conduct are of the highest kind. In the same way, the word *idealism* when applied to literature often denotes the tendency to portray life as we should wish it to be; that is, as something more nearly perfect than real life. When we picture life as it is not, we are prone to represent it as better than it is, and when we picture it as better than it is, we are necessarily representing it as it is not; therefore both of the meanings which we have given to idealism are usually present at the same time.

Plato's *Republic* exemplifies idealism. In the *Timaëus* Plato has Socrates say:

Plato's <i>Republic</i> and More's <i>Utopia</i> .	. . . the theme of my yesterday's discourse was the state—how constituted and of what citizens composed it should seem likely to be most perfect. <sup>1</sup>
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Socrates has reference to the *Republic*, in which he appears as chief speaker, and the words show that in the

<sup>1</sup> From Jowett's translation.

*Republic* Plato was describing not an actual state but an imaginary commonwealth, better in his opinion than any then actually existing. It was an ideal commonwealth both in that it was unreal and in that it showed Plato's conception of a superlatively excellent republic. Likewise Sir Thomas More gives us an example of idealism in his *Utopia*, for there he pictures a commonwealth far more nearly perfect than the real kingdoms of his day. By the very title *Utopia*, which means the Land of Nowhere, he announces at the outset that what he is about to describe is altogether imaginary. The following representative excerpt from *Utopia* is typically idealistic:

They have but few laws; for to people so instruct and institute very few do suffice. Yea, this thing they chiefly reprove among other nations, that innumerable books of laws and expositions upon the same be not sufficient. But they think it is against all right and justice that men should be bound to those laws which either be in number more than be able to be read or else blinder and darker than that any man can well understand them. Furthermore they utterly exclude and banish all proctors and sergeants at the law, which craftily handle matters and subtly dispute of the laws; for they think it most meet that every man should plead his own matter and tell the same tale before the judge that he would tell to his man of law. So shall there be less circumstance of words and the truth shall sooner come to light; whiles the judge with a discreet judgment doth weigh the words of him whom no lawyer hath instruct with deceit and whiles he helpeth and beareth out simple wits against the false and malicious circumventions of crafty children.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Utopia*, which was written originally in Latin, was translated into English by Raphe Robynson in 1551. From this translation which has frequently been re-

However, works of literature can be idealistic without dealing in such utterly imaginary perfections. Many romantic novels which do not go so far as to borrow their heroes and heroines from Utopia are nevertheless idealistic because they present those heroes and heroines as people who in rare instances might conceivably exist in this world, but who are much more nearly perfect than even the best of the men and women whom we ordinarily see about us. Scott's *Ivanhoe*, to mention but one example, gives us an idealized hero in Wilfred of Ivanhoe, who always does the brave and noble thing without hesitation. Near the beginning of the story the hero's superlative nobility of character is made apparent. Wilfred does not treat Isaac of York as the other guests in Cedric's banquet hall treat him:

The reception of this person [Isaac] in the hall of Cedric the Saxon was such as might have satisfied the most prejudiced enemy of the tribes of Israel. Cedric himself coldly nodded in answer to the Jew's repeated salutations, and signed to him to take a place at the lower end of the table, where, however, no one offered to make room for him. On the contrary, as he passed along the file, casting a timid, supplicating glance, and turning towards each of those who occupied the lower end of the board, the Saxon domestics squared their shoulders, and continued to devour their supper with great perseverance, paying not the least attention to the wants of the new guest. The attendants of the abbot crossed themselves with looks of pious horror, and the very heathen Saracens, as Isaac drew near them, curled up their whiskers

printed, the above passage is taken. The spelling in this reprint has been modernized.

with indignation, and laid their hands on their poniards, as if ready to rid themselves by the most desperate means from the apprehended contamination of his nearer approach.

Now Wilfred, who has but recently returned from the Holy Land and is referred to as the pilgrim because he still wears his pilgrim's garb and is not recognized even by his father, can hardly fail to be affected by the current religious prejudice against the Jews; yet he overcomes his prejudice enough to treat Isaac with kindness:

While Isaac thus stood an outcast in the present society, like his people among the nations, looking in vain for welcome or resting-place, the Pilgrim, who sat by the chimney, took compassion upon him, and resigned his seat, saying briefly, "Old man, my garments are dried, my hunger is appeased; thou art both wet and fasting." So saying, he gathered together and brought to a flame, the decaying brands which lay scattered on the ample hearth; took from the larger board a mess of pottage and seethed kid, placed it upon the small table at which he had himself supped, and without waiting the Jew's thanks, went to the other side of the hall, whether from unwillingness to hold more close communion with the object of his benevolence, or from a wish to draw near to the upper end of the table, seemed uncertain.

To be sure, Wilfred is not an errant spirit coming from heaven or Utopia to medieval England; instead, he represents the kind of man who might actually have existed. Doubtless such people did exist; nevertheless, they were rare exceptions. Here Wilfred of Ivanhoe behaves as a man of his time might conceivably have

behaved, but not as such a man was likely to behave. He does what we should wish a hero to do rather than what we should expect of a man who lived in the rough days of Richard the Lion-hearted. He is an idealized character—a typical hero of romance.

And in romantic novels we are likely to see idealistic treatment of incidents as well as of characters. *Ivanhoe* again provides an illustration. Unjustly accused of sorcery, Rebecca is to lose her life unless some champion

Idealistic Treatment of Incidents.	appears to save her. In the nick of time, Wilfred, who has scarcely recovered from wounds received at the tournament and is almost too weak to sit upon his horse, arrives at Templestowe. He bravely faces Rebecca's tormentor, Bois-Guilbert, but in his weakened condition he cannot be expected to defeat so formidable an adversary. When he charges against Bois-Guilbert, he is immediately thrown from his horse. However, to the amazement of all present, Bois-Guilbert falls dead, struck down not by Wilfred, but, as it seems, by the wrath of God:
--	--

The trumpets sounded, and the knights charged each other in full career. The wearied horse of Ivanhoe, and its no less exhausted rider, went down, as all had expected, before the well-aimed lance and vigorous steed of the Templar. This issue of the combat all had foreseen; but although the spear of Ivanhoe did but, in comparison, touch the shield of Bois-Guilbert, that champion, to the astonishment of all who beheld it, reeled in his saddle, lost his stirrups, and fell in the lists.

Ivanhoe, extricating himself from his fallen horse, was soon on foot, hastening to mend his fortune with his sword; but his antagonist arose not. Wilfred, placing his foot on his

breast, and the sword's point to his throat, commanded him to yield him, or die on the spot. Bois-Guilbert returned no answer.

"Slay him not, Sir Knight," cried the Grand Master, "unshriven and unabsolved; kill not body and soul! We allow him vanquished."

He descended into the lists, and commanded them to unhelm the conquered champion. His eyes were closed; the dark red flush was still on his brow. As they looked on him in astonishment, the eyes opened; but they were fixed and glazed. The flush passed from his brow, and gave way to the pallid hue of death. Unscathed by the lance of his enemy, he had died a victim to the violence of his own contending passions.

"This is indeed the judgment of God," said the Grand Master, looking upwards—"fat voluntas tua!"

The treatment of this incident is idealistic because Scott makes things turn out more luckily for Wilfred than would probably have been the case in real life; yet the incident is true to life in one respect, for it illustrates retribution. In the real world Bois-Guilbert would hardly have fallen dead at so convenient a time, but he would most likely have suffered punishment sooner or later. And although Scott is interested primarily in telling a story and not in moralizing, he teaches a lesson indirectly when he fixes our attention upon the punishment of Bois-Guilbert. Indeed, it is often true that idealistic romances not only give us the pleasure to be found in following a good story, but also teach moral truths. Just as the realist by picturing life at its worst gives an example of what to avoid, so the idealist by painting life

Didactic  
Quality in  
Idealism.

at its best, or as it might be, gives an example of what to admire, or, perhaps, to imitate. Professor Cross says that in *A Tale of Two Cities* Dickens "preaches a sermon on the sublime text, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'" And Dickens preaches that lesson simply by holding up an idealized character, Sydney Carton, as an example. In these words from the conversation between Carton and the little seamstress which took place not long before they died we find a lesson:

"Are you dying for him?" she whispered.

"And his wife and child. Hush! Yes."

Again the term *idealism* may be used in a somewhat different way. Idealism may be defined as "aspiration after or pursuit of an ideal." A work of literature which does not depict what is unreal or preternaturally excellent will nevertheless be idealistic if it stresses the effort to attain things which are above and beyond us, or the yearning to reach a state of perfection forever unattainable. Idealism of this kind goes hand in hand with romanticism.

Pursuit of  
the Ideal.

For example, it appears in poems and stories which have to do with the Holy Grail. Those poems and stories are romantic because the quest which they describe is an adventure, and they are idealistic because the object of the quest is an ideal. And idealism of this kind is by no means limited to stories of the Grail. The pursuit of the ideal finds typical expression in Longfellow's "Excelsior." We need not quote the poem, for to nearly all readers it is familiar enough. Let us quote instead a letter which Longfellow wrote to C. K. Tuckerman in

explanation of his poem. Longfellow's letter shows how the emphasis in this kind of idealism rests upon struggle towards the ideal rather than upon the ideal itself:

I have had the pleasure of receiving your note in regard to the poem, "Excelsior," and very willingly give you my intention in writing it. This was no more than to display, in a series of pictures, the life of a man of genius, resisting all temptations, laying aside all fears, heedless of all warnings, and pressing right on to accomplish his purpose. His motto is *Excelsior*, "higher." He passes through the Alpine village—through the rough, cold paths of the world—where the peasants cannot understand him, and where the watchword is an "unknown tongue." He disregards the happiness of domestic peace and sees the glaciers—his fate—before him. He disregards the warning of the old man's wisdom and the fascinations of woman's love. He answers to all, "higher yet!" The monks of St. Bernard are the representatives of religious forms and ceremonies, and with their oft-repeated prayer mingles the sound of his voice, telling them that there is something higher than forms and ceremonies. Filled with these aspirations, he perishes; without having reached the perfection he longed for; and the voice heard in the air is the promise of immortality and progress ever upward.<sup>3</sup>

This kind of idealism which emphasizes the quest without attempting to define the goal shows itself clearly in Poe's "Eldorado":

Gaily bedight,  
A gallant knight,  
In sunshine and in shadow,  
Had journeyed long,

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Curtis Hidden Page, *The Chief American Poets*. Boston, New York, and Chicago (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1905, p. 112.



Singing a song,  
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old—  
This knight so bold—  
And o'er his heart a shadow  
Fell as he found  
No spot of ground  
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength  
Failed him at length,  
He met a pilgrim shadow—  
"Shadow," said he—  
"Where can it be—  
This land of Eldorado?"

"Over the Mountains  
Of the Moon,  
Down the Valley of the Shadow,  
Ride, boldly ride,"  
The shade replied,—  
"If you seek for Eldorado."

*So far as literature is concerned,<sup>4</sup> idealism, as we have seen, has two meanings. It may stand for the tendency to depict things as more nearly perfect than they actually are, or it may stand for the pursuit of unattainable perfection. Though the idealist does not paint the ordinary facts of life with photographic accuracy, in the sum total, his picture is not necessarily false, because he often makes us keenly aware*

Summary.

<sup>4</sup> In philosophy, idealism has other meanings, and sometimes those meanings are carried over into literature. For instance, the poetry of Spenser often shows the influence of Platonic idealism.

*of spiritual forces which, though silent and unseen, are ever at work in the material world.*

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the etymology of the word *idealism*? 2. What does the word ordinarily mean when used in literature? 3. How does the idealist picture life? 4. How is idealism the opposite of realism? 5. In what respects do Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia* exemplify idealism? 6. Why can we say that Scott's chief characters in *Ivanhoe* are idealized? 7. Why can we say that *Ivanhoe* shows idealistic treatment of incidents? 8. In what way does idealistic literature often teach a lesson? 9. What other meaning does the word *idealism* sometimes have in literature?

### EXERCISES

1. Give careful attention to the thought in this extract:

The ideal college, therefore, should be a community, a place of close, natural, intimate association, not only of the young men who are its pupils and novices in various lines of study, but also of young men with older men, with maturer men, with veterans and professionals in the great undertaking of learning, of teachers with pupils, outside the classroom as well as inside of it. No one is successfully educated within the walls of any particular classroom or laboratory or museum; and no amount of association, however close and familiar and delightful, between mere beginners can ever produce the sort of enlightenment which the lad gets when he first begins to catch the infection of learning. The trouble with most of our colleges nowadays is that the faculty of the college live one life and the undergraduates a different one. They are not members of the same community; they constitute two communities. The life of the undergraduate is not touched with the personal influence of the teacher; life among the teachers is not touched by the personal impressions which should come from frequent and intimate contact with undergraduates. The teacher does not often enough

know what the undergraduate is thinking about or what models he is forming his life upon, and the undergraduate does not know how human a fellow the teacher is, how delightfully he can talk, outside the classroom, of the subjects he is most interested in, how many interesting things both his life and his studies illustrate and make attractive. This separation need not exist, and, in the college of the ideal university, would not exist.<sup>5</sup>

In what respect does this paragraph illustrate idealism? In your own words sum up briefly the thoughts here expressed.

2. By definite references to the life and work of Woodrow Wilson, explain why he is usually called an idealist.

3. Here is the concluding paragraph of Stevenson's essay "El Dorado." As you read it, keep in mind Poe's lyric "Eldorado" quoted at the end of this chapter:

A strange picture we make on our way to our chimeras, ceaselessly marching, grudging ourselves the time for rest; indefatigable, adventurous pioneers. It is true that we shall never reach the goal; it is even more than probable that there is no such place; and if we lived for centuries and were endowed with the powers of a god, we should find ourselves not much nearer what we wanted at the end. O toiling hands of mortals! O unwearied feet, travelling ye know not whither! Soon, soon, it seems to you, you must come forth on some conspicuous hilltop, and but a little way further, against the setting sun, descry the spires of El Dorado. Little do ye know your own blessedness; for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and true success is to labor.

In what way is the thought here expressed similar to that in Poe's "Eldorado"? What kind of idealism is here illustrated? Summarize this paragraph briefly in your own words.

<sup>5</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "My Ideal of the True University," *Delineator*, November, 1909.

## CHAPTER VIII

### REALISM

THE word *realism* is formed from the word *real*, which comes from the late Latin adjective *realis*, a derivative of *res*, the Latin for *thing*, or *fact*. The word *realism*, as its etymology suggests, denotes attachment to fact, or "the tendency to regard things as they really are." We may look upon realism in literature as the opposite of idealism, because the purpose of realism is to represent life not as it ought to be, but as it is. And it follows as a corollary that realism is, on the whole, the opposite of romanticism; for, as we have seen, romanticism is usually bound up with idealism. Sometimes when we use the term *realism*, we have in mind certain books which began to attract a great deal of attention in the latter part of the nineteenth century and have exerted a very widespread influence upon literature—the novels of Emile Zola, for example. These books, which exhibit an exaggerated realism of a certain distinctive quality, are often designated as *naturalistic*. For the present we shall leave them out of consideration.

The truest realism should give a broad picture of life. It should not overemphasize life's dramatic moments, nor should it be preoccupied with people who for one reason or another stand out apart from the everyday men and women we are accustomed to see around us. It should show life as it is—a thing compounded of

many opposites, such as good and evil, beauty and ugliness. And besides, it should not neglect those dull flat stretches of commonplace existence which must occupy the largest part of any true picture of life. This last requirement is the hardest for the realistic writer to fulfill. A faithful record of everyday people and happenings will necessarily contain so much which is colorless and trivial that it will not be likely to prove entertaining to the ordinary reader. In attempting such a record the realist starts out under a handicap. Some writers, however, through their exceptional power to observe and their superior gift of expression are able to make even the flat stretches interesting.

Perfect realism in literature is unattainable, for no writer can actually observe more than a relatively small portion of life, and every writer's description even of what he personally sees is necessarily affected by his particular way of seeing things. We can nevertheless say that Jane Austen was, in her limited field, a true realist. She turned aside from the extravagances of romantic fiction; in *Northanger Abbey* she even went so far as to satirize the "Gothic Romances." On the other hand, she did not preoccupy herself with those ugly corners of life which have often proved so balefully attractive to lesser realists. Between the two extremes she held a fairly even course. But her great merit as a realist lay in her ability to make the humdrum seem amusing. This peculiar ability of Jane Austen's won the following tribute from Sir Walter Scott:

That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements, and feelings, and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I have ever met with. The big *bow-wow* strain I can do myself, like any one now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied me.

In other words, when we hear Jane Austen recount trivial events, we often find in them a meaning which would have escaped us had we witnessed the events ourselves. And when we look through her eyes, we observe subtle differences between those men and women who conform so closely to the usual types that we ordinarily recognize little individuality in them. Macaulay, in his essay on Madame D'Arblay, says this about Jane Austen's characters:

She has given us a multitude of characters, all, in a certain sense, commonplace, all such as we meet every day. Yet they are all as perfectly discriminated from each other as if they were the most eccentric of human beings. There are, for instance, four clergymen, none of whom we should be surprised to find in any parsonage in the kingdom, Mr. Edward Ferrars, Mr. Henry Tilney, Mr. Edmund Bertram, and Mr. Elton. They are all specimens of the upper part of the middle class. They have all been liberally educated. They all lie under the restraints of the same sacred profession. They are all young. They are all in love. Not one of them has any hobbyhorse, to use the phrase of Sterne. Not one has a ruling passion, such as we read of in Pope. Who would not have expected them to be insipid likenesses of each other? No such thing. Harpagon is not more unlike to Jourdain, Joseph Surface is not more unlike to Sir Lucius O'Trigger,

than every one of Miss Austen's young divines to all his reverend brethren. And almost all this is done by touches so delicate, that they elude analysis, that they defy the powers of description, and that we know them to exist only by the general effect to which they have contributed.

Though no single detached passage can adequately illustrate Jane Austen's realism, the following bit of conversation from her novel *Emma* may give some idea of how her realistic portrayal of life combines unobtrusiveness with power. Emma Woodhouse and her father live in a village called Hartfield. Mrs. Weston, who before her marriage has resided for sixteen years in Mr. Woodhouse's family "less as a governess than as a friend," is now living at Randalls. Mrs. Weston is here conversing with Mr. Knightley, another friend of Emma's. The conversation has to do with Emma, Mr. Knightley being the first speaker:

"She always declares she will never marry, which of course, means just nothing at all. But I have no idea that she has ever seen a man she cared for. It would not be a bad thing for her to be very much in love with a proper object. I should like to see Emma in love, and in some doubt of a return; it would do her good. But there is nobody hereabouts to attach her; and she goes so seldom from home."

"There does indeed seem as little to tempt her to break her resolution at present," said Mrs. Weston, "as well can be; and while she is so happy at Hartfield, I cannot wish her to be forming any attachment which would be creating such difficulties, on poor Mr. Woodhouse's account. I do not recommend matrimony at present to Emma, though I mean no slight to the state I assure you."

Part of her meaning was to conceal some favorite thoughts

of her own and Mr. Weston's on the subject as much as possible. There were wishes at Randalls respecting Emma's destiny, but it was not desirable to have them suspected; and the quiet transition which Mr. Knightley made to "What does Weston think of the weather?—shall we have rain?" convinced her that he had nothing more to say or surmise about Hartfield.

Jane Austen does not let the significance of this lifelike but apparently trivial conversation escape us; and when we reach the end of the novel, we remember the "wishes at Randalls respecting Emma's destiny," for Emma becomes Mrs. Knightley.

Jane Austen depicts life among people of the middle and the upper classes, but much of the realistic literature which is most familiar to us shows a marked tendency to deal with people in the lower walks of life. And it is entirely natural that the realists in their antipathy towards romantic idealism, which was so often chiefly concerned with noble knights and gentle ladies, should go not only to the middle classes but also to the lower social levels, and bring into the pages of literature those humble men and women who play a large if inconspicuous part in the human drama. This tendency showed itself in the ancient classical literature. We see it in the following bit of conversation from the *Satirae* of Petronius. The speakers are guests at a dinner party given by a certain Trimalchio. The host and his guests belong to the freed-man class; in other words, their station in society is not far above that of slaves:

"What is a day?" cried Dama, after calling for a larger glass. "Nothing! Before you have time to turn round it is

Portrayal  
of the  
Humble.



night. One should therefore go straight from the bedroom to the dining room. And what a regular freezing we have been having of late! I could scarcely get hot in my bath. However, a hot drink is as good as a greatcoat. I've had some stiff ones, and I am about full; it has got into my head." Here Seleucus broke in with, "I don't take a bath every day. Constant washing wears out the body as well as the clothes; but when I've put down my good posset of mead, I can tell the cold go hang. However, I could not have bathed to-day in any case, as I had to attend a funeral. Poor Chrysanthus, you know, a nice fellow, has just slipped his wind. It was only the other day he said how d'ye do to me. I can fancy I am talking to him now. Ah, we are only air balloons, summer flies; this life's a bubble. And it's not as if he hadn't tried the fasting cure. For five days neither bit nor sup passed his lips, and yet he's gone. Too many doctors did for him, or else it was to be. A doctor's really no use except to feel you did the right thing.<sup>1</sup>

But although realistic writers are likely to choose their characters from the humble and obscure, the mere choice of such people does not make realism. The realist must also picture those humble people just as they are in life. Pastoral poetry, for instance, though it deals with lowly shepherds and shepherdesses, is usually not realistic. Its shepherds and shepherdesses are ordinarily idealized, and they are commonly presented in a highly artificial and romantic setting. In short, they do not appear to us as actual men and women whom we might meet in the pastures herding sheep. Petronius's freedmen, on the other hand, stand out as real men of their class, and their

Representa-  
tion of Life  
as It Is.

<sup>1</sup> This is taken from Tyrrell's translation. See G. J. Laing, *Masterpieces of Latin Literature*. Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1903, p. 389.

conversation is vividly true to life. We may affirm then that the realist not only brings the life of the lower and even the lowest classes into literature, but also insists upon revealing that life as it actually is.

Rebellion against the idealized pictures of country life to which so many lines of pastoral poetry are devoted appears unmistakably in the works of the realist, George Crabbe. Near the beginning of his poem "The Village" he says:

To sing of shepherds is an easy task:  
The happy youth assumes the common strain,  
A nymph his mistress, and himself a swain;  
With no sad scenes he clouds his tuneful prayer,  
But all, to look like her, is painted fair.

I grant indeed that fields and flocks have charms  
For him that grazes or for him that farms;  
But when amid such pleasing scenes I trace  
The poor laborious natives of the place,  
And see the mid-day sun, with fervid ray,  
On their bare heads and dewy temples play;  
While some with feeble heads and fainter hearts,  
Deplore their fortunes, yet sustain their parts—  
Then shall I dare these real ills to hide  
In tinsel trappings of poetic pride?

And there are certainly no "tinsel trappings" in Crabbe's typically realistic description of the village poorhouse:

Theirs is yon House that holds the parish poor,  
Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door;  
There, where the putrid vapours, flagging play,  
And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day;—  
There children dwell who know no parents' care;  
Parents, who know no children's love dwell there!

Heart-broken matrons on their joyless bed,  
Forsaken wives, and mothers never wed;  
Dejected widows with unheeded tears,  
And crippled age with more than childhood fears;  
The lame, the blind, and, far the happiest they!  
The moping idiot, and the madman gay.

At times even the romantic poet, Wordsworth, deals with commonplace scenes and people in a realistic way. When he chose such subjects, he purposed to give his pictures a "coloring of imagination"; nevertheless, they are essentially realistic pictures. Some critics have gone so far as to include this interest in common life, which is often present in romantic poetry and especially in Wordsworth, as one of the distinctive qualities of romanticism in general. So far as interest in common life exalted the individual and reflected romantic humanitarianism, it is indeed typical of romanticism; but to the extent that it placed emphasis upon lifelike portrayal of everyday people or of the humble it is typical rather of realism. Certainly we should be justified in calling Wordsworth's poem "The Old Cumberland Beggar" realistic. Here is a representative passage from that poem:

He travels on, a solitary Man;  
His age has no companion. On the ground  
His eyes are turned, and, as he moves along,  
*They* move along the ground; and, evermore,  
Instead of common and habitual sight  
Of fields with rural works, of hill and dale,  
And the blue sky, one little span of earth  
Is all his prospect. Thus, from day to day,

Bow-bent, his eyes for ever on the ground,  
 He plies his weary journey; seeing still,  
 And seldom knowing that he sees, some straw,  
 Some scattered leaf, or marks which, in one track,  
 The nails of cart or chariot-wheel have left  
 Impressed on the white road,—in the same line,  
 At distance still the same. Poor Traveller!  
 His staff trails with him; scarcely do his feet  
 Disturb the summer dust; he is so still  
 In look and motion, that the cottage curs,  
 Ere he has passed the door, will turn away,  
 Weary of barking at him.

But realism does not stop with exploring the lower levels of society. Realism does not hesitate to disclose the ugliness and shabbiness which have their place in life. The scene depicted in No. I of Mr. T. S. Eliot's *Preludes* is realistic and it is anything but beautiful:

Depiction  
 of the  
 Unattractive.

The winter evening settles down  
 With smells of steaks in passageways.  
 Six o'clock.  
 The burnt-out ends of smoky days.  
 And now a gusty shower wraps  
 The grimy scraps  
 Of withered leaves about his feet  
 And newspapers from vacant lots;  
 The showers beat  
 On broken blinds and chimney pots,  
 And at the corner of the street  
 A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.  
 And then the lighting of the lamps.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> From T. S. Eliot, *Poems*, 1909-1925. By permission of and special arrangement with Harcourt, Brace and Company.

This poem shows that realistic literature is not averse to bringing things inherently unattractive into prominence. However, it does not exemplify brutal realism, for it does not picture anything which is actually repulsive. Indeed in the sum total, its effect is pleasing. We enjoy the poem because its intense realism makes us recall sights which have come before our own eyes and feelings which we ourselves have experienced. Moreover, we enjoy it because it is a poem. The author is not imprisoned in his own realism. What he has written represents realism with poetry stalking in the background.

Brutally realistic literature does more than give prominence to the unattractive. It paints with merciless exactness the sheer ugliness, filth, and horror which can be found in life. There are scenes which few of us would care to witness in reality or take pleasure in remembering if we had witnessed them. For example, in Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* we find a piece of description which displays unalloyed ugliness and horror at its worst:

Near the threshold he stopped, horror-stricken at the sight of a thing.

He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a columnlike tree. The corpse was dressed in a uniform that had once been blue, but was now faded to a melancholy shade of green. The eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red had changed to appalling yellow. Over the gray skin of the face ran

little ants. One was trundling some sort of a bundle along the upper lip.<sup>3</sup>

When we read this as a passage detached from its context, it impresses us as nothing more than extreme and repulsive realism. If we read it in its context, however—and, of course, we cannot reproduce the context here—we see that it belongs to naturalistic literature. When Crane wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*, he had not yet seen the dead on a real battlefield; he was relying upon his imagination. In describing this dead man, he could hardly have been offering us a word photograph of what he had actually observed, though he might possibly have witnessed something which suggested the scene here described. In any case, he was certainly aiming at more than mere realistic portrayal. The corpse which his uncannily potent imagination has depicted with such pitiless fidelity to fact is simply a part of the whole picture presented by his book, and that picture exhibits Crane's naturalistic view of life. We can make all this clear by quoting part of what Professor Shafer says about Crane:

His real work, however, was the search for the intense and burning core of "reality." He turned in disgust from the sentimentalism and prim decorum characteristic of much popular American fiction in his day, and felt that even the self-confessed realists saw life through blinders. He concluded that the bare, essential truth about life was to be discovered by stripping it of its decoration, of its accretions of culture and respectability. . . . Meanwhile the search for the "real" continued, and Crane began to imagine that it would

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*. New York (D. Appleton-Century Company), 1930, p. 92.

be rewarded by the study of war, which, he thought, by its cruelties and terrors strips men of their accidental trappings and exposes their essential natures. . . . Crane's ideal in both prose and verse was honesty according to his own lights. His vision was one-sided, and it led him towards a brutal naturalism.<sup>4</sup>

From Professor Shafer's comment we see that *The Red Badge of Courage* exemplifies not only extreme realism, but also a peculiar use of realism. Stephen Crane chose the ugliest and most horrible things which he could find in life; he described them in a brutally realistic way, permitting no poetry to stalk in the background; and he used them as if they characterized life as a whole. This making life as a whole appear horrible and ugly is one of the characteristics which makes naturalism different from realism. In the next chapter we shall continue with the study of naturalism. First, however, let us pause to restate briefly our conclusions concerning realism proper.

*Realism proper aims at portraying life as it is. The truest realism offers a broad picture of life—a picture which does not give undue prominence to life's dramatic aspects or to its ugliness, but includes in proper proportion the commonplace and usually uninteresting events in our daily routine. However, in rebelling against idealistic romanticism, which was to a great extent preoccupied with people of the upper classes, realism often shows a preference for depicting the lives of the humble and obscure. Sometimes, moreover, realism descends to the lowest strata of society*

<sup>4</sup> Robert Shafer, *American Literature*. Garden City (Doubleday, Doran and Company), 1926, p. 349.

*for its subjects and paints with relentless frankness the ugliness, filth, and horror which it finds. When realism does that, it is merging into naturalism.*

### QUESTIONS

1. From what Latin word is the word *realism* derived?
2. What does the term *realism* mean?
3. How does realism in literature differ from idealism?
4. Why does it usually differ in the same way from romanticism?
5. How should the truest realism depict life?
6. Why is it difficult to do that and interest a reader at the same time?
7. What great English writer succeeded in producing entertaining novels which picture life in that way?
8. With what class of people does this novelist deal?
9. With what other class do realists more often deal?
10. Is pastoral poetry usually realistic or idealistic?
11. What class of people did Crabbe portray in his realistic poetry?
12. Did Wordsworth ever write realistic poems?
13. Does realism hesitate to present what is ugly and unattractive in life?
14. What is meant by "brutal realism"?

### EXERCISES

1. Though the author of the following excerpt refers only to the drama his definitions are capable of wider application:

Let me attempt first of all to define these terms, Idealism and Realism. A dramatist, we will suppose, is asking himself how he shall treat human characters, and he discovers at least three possible ways. He can say in the first place, "I will paint human beings as I think they *ought* to be." In other words, he is applying, however unconsciously, a sort of ethical test to the men and women whose actions he is about to describe. He believes that it is his duty (in order, we shall say, to help ordinary suffering and erring humanity) to paint certain ideals of conduct and behavior, good and bad alike—heroes that are ideal heroes, villains that are ideal villains, heroines that are virtuous and in distress, comic men who,



despite a lamentable tendency to idiotic witticisms, have a heart of gold—and all the other heterogeneous items in a romantic conception of existence.

We can imagine, however, a dramatist with a very different ideal before him. He says, "My business as an artist is to paint men as I think they are," not very good, not very bad, average creatures sometimes with good intentions, often with bad performance, meaning well and doing ill, struggling with various besetting temptations and struggling also perhaps with a heritage derived from earlier generations—above all, never heroes and never heroines, nor even thorough-going villains, not beautifully white nor preternaturally black, but (as one might phrase it) of a piebald variety. . . . But the third species of dramatist . . . the man who is artist first and throughout, who exercises his faculty of selection, as every artist should, who is never a didactic moralist, any more than he is a photographer, who does not paint, so to speak, the wrinkles and the pimples, but gives you the general meaning of the face—the Sophoclean type in short—is one for whom there is not yet a name—except the good old name of dramatic artist.<sup>5</sup>

Do you agree with what is here set forth? What poems, novels, or plays can you name which would answer to the first definition? What ones could you point out that would answer to the second? In each case show specifically how they answer. Would you include Shakespeare in the "third species of dramatist"? Why, or why not?

2. Justify the statement that *Robinson Crusoe* is a romantic story realistically presented.

3. Condense the thought in this extract and express it as briefly as possible in your own words:

. . . Since now poetry also frequently describes base actions and depraved emotions and character, the youth must not confound their artistic admirableness and success with truth, nor rank them as beautiful, but is only to praise them as accurate and truthful likenesses of the things treated. For as we are annoyed when we

<sup>5</sup> W. L. Courtney, *Old Saws and Modern Instances*. New York (E. P. Dutton and Company), 1918, p. 161.

hear the grunting of a hog, the noise of pulleys, the whistling of the wind, and the roaring of the seas, but are pleased if any one imitates them with naturalness, as Parmenio did the hog, and Theodorus the pulleys, and as we avoid the unpleasant sight of an unhealthy man with festering sores, but take pleasure in witnessing the *Philoctetes* of Aristophon and the *Jocasta* of Silanion, which are realistic likenesses of wasting and dying persons, so when the youth reads what Thersites the fool, or Sisyphus the debaucher, or Batrachus the brothel-keeper says or does, he must be taught to praise the genius and art which imitates, but to censure the subjects and actions with opprobrium. For the excellence of a thing and the excellence of its imitation are not the same; fitness and naturalness constitute excellence, but to things base the base is natural and fit.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Consider the following definitions:

Romanticism is the tendency characterized by the predomination of imagination over reason and the sense of fact. Classicism is the tendency characterized by the predominance of reason over imagination and the sense of fact. Realism is the tendency characterized by the predominance of the sense of fact over imagination and reason.<sup>7</sup>

From the literary works which you have read take one in which imagination predominates over reason and the sense of fact. In what other respect is it romantic? Illustrate. Then take one in which reason predominates over imagination and the sense of fact. Is it classical in other respects? Illustrate. Finally take one in which the sense of fact predominates over imagination and reason. Is it realistic in the truest sense, or brutally realistic? Illustrate.

<sup>6</sup> Plutarch, *How a Young Man Should Study Poetry*, in F. M. Padelford, *Essays on the Study and Use of Poetry*. New York (Henry Holt and Company), 1902, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> W. A. Neilson, *Essentials of Poetry*. Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1912, p. 38.

## CHAPTER IX

### NATURALISM

**AS** we have just seen, naturalism is an exaggerated form of realism; as it shows itself commonly in practice, it might be described as a realistic presentation of the under side of life, fortified by a peculiar theory of what is ultimately real. It is significant that science, which is the father of this theory, was first called "natural philosophy," and retained this name into the eighteenth century. Naturalism may also be looked upon as a revolt against romanticism, though, in part at least, romanticism was derived from the same source.

Naturalism  
in Modern  
Literature.

The predominance of reason which we have observed in the pseudo-classical writings of the eighteenth century was not confined to literature; it was typical of the period in general and shows itself clearly in the religious outlook of that age. For many, religion took the form of deism. The deists set out to give a natural—by which they meant reasonable—explanation of the mysteries in Christian dogma and proceeded directly to the denial of supernatural revelation. To the extent that deism championed the natural and excluded the supernatural, it was a naturalistic philosophy. Criticism has charged the deists with making God a remote being who allowed the world to be governed entirely by natural laws which he had established—"a divine absentee who wound up

The  
Influence  
of Deism.

the machine of nature and left it to run untended." This criticism may not be entirely just, but the statements of the deists certainly carry the implication of such a theory.<sup>1</sup> In any case, the idea that the universe is a vast automatic machine was well established in the eighteenth century, especially in the field of scientific thought.

In this conception of the world, which leaves no place for the supernatural or for free will or for the sense of human responsibility, man is reduced to a mere part of "nature," differing in no respect from the animals. And it was against this abuse of what was regarded as the result of reasoning about the nature of things that the Romantics of the eighteenth century revolted. Unfortunately Romanticism tended to set up the emotions as the true bearers of the supernatural element of man's being, with such consequences as we have seen. But the rationalism and materialism continued side by side with this revolt, and in the end was bound to regain its dominance when the evils of irrationalism were felt. It was bound to find aggressive expression in literature sooner or later. The literary expression of scientific materialism, falling in with the revolt against the ro-

Origin of  
Modern  
Literary  
Naturalism.

<sup>1</sup> The deists differed greatly among themselves in their beliefs concerning God and his relation to the universe. John Toland, who is usually classed as a deist, came even to a pantheistic conception of God, and, supposedly, was the first writer to use the word *pantheism*, although the doctrine to which he applied it was nothing new. It is also interesting to note that Diderot, who was in many respects a deist and whose encyclopedia had so far-reaching an influence, was inclined towards pantheism. The same thing was true, in turn, of Rousseau, who was well read in the theories of the deists. Thus we see pantheistic tendencies brought down into the Romantic Movement, and we recall that Wordsworth's treatment of nature sometimes at least verged on pantheism, as in the case of his "Tintern Abbey."

mantics, gave rise to modern literary naturalism, of which Emile Zola is usually considered the high priest.

Zola received most of his inspiration from science. He read with enthusiasm Claude Bernard's *Introduction à la Médecine expérimentale*, published in 1865, and in his own critical work, *Le Roman expérimental*, published fifteen years later, he drew a close parallel between the ideas previously set forth by the scientist, Bernard, and his own naturalistic theory of fiction. Using the expression "experimental novel" for what is really the "naturalistic novel," he says:

The experimental novel is a consequence of the scientific evolution of the century; it continues and completes physiology, which itself rests upon chemistry and physics; it substitutes for the study of the abstract or metaphysical man, the study of the natural man subject to physico-chemical laws and determined by the influence of his environment.<sup>2</sup>

This statement not only acknowledges the indebtedness of literary naturalism to science, but it also suggests that determinism—the theory "that all moral choice, so called, is the determined or necessary result of psychological and other conditions"—is to have a dominating place in the new naturalistic literature. Zola makes his own position in regard to determinism absolutely clear, for elsewhere in the same treatise, he writes this:

All that one can say is that there is an absolute determinism for all human phenomena.

<sup>2</sup> The passages from Zola are translated from *Le Roman expérimental* in *Les Œuvres Complètes, Emile Zola*, ed. Maurice Le Blond, Vol. 46.

And in still another passage, which again shows Zola's scientific attitude and also expresses his antagonism towards romantic idealism, we see determinism brought into intimate connection with the theory of naturalistic literature:

We [the naturalists] must operate upon characters, passions, and actions both human and social, as the chemist and the physicist operate on inorganic bodies, and as the physiologist operates on living bodies. Determinism governs all things. In scientific investigation, it is experimental reasoning which combats one by one the hypotheses of the idealists and replaces the novels of pure imagination by the novels of observation and experiment.

Made thus without qualification a mere product of heredity and environment, man becomes nothing but a machine guided simply by the action of physical and chemical laws. This is the position to which Zola was inexorably driven by his naturalistic philosophy, and he accepted it without hesitation, coming to view man as the "human machine" rather than as the human being. Yet in fairness it must be admitted that he had the spirit of the reformer. He believed that a naturalistic study of men's conduct and emotions would lead to a control of conditions which produce suffering and unhappiness; accordingly he speaks of the "usefulness and high morality of naturalistic works, which take apart the human machine and reassemble it piece by piece in order to make it function under the influence of its environment."

But by making man absolutely subject to determinism, Zola wiped out any distinction in kind between

man and the beast, and thereby took a stand directly opposed to that of the humanists. The distinction which Aristotle made, that animals are capable only of a dark purposing, for example, the purpose to seek food, but that men have what might be called a "mapped" purpose, or purpose for the future, cannot hold true in a world dominated completely by determinism. And not only did Zola make men similar to the animals in kind, but he was also disposed, so it would seem, to place them little above the animals in degree. In his eyes man was essentially the brute and life was, for the most part, unlovely. Indeed he admits that it is just this pessimistic conviction of the naturalists which is responsible for the gloom in most naturalistic literature:

Our analysis remains cruel because our analysis goes to the interior of the human cadaver. High and low, we come upon the brute. To be sure, there are veils more or less numerous, but when we have described the one after the other, and when we lift the last, we always see behind it more of filth than of flowers. That is why our books are so gloomy.

Zola's theory, which may be considered fairly representative of the naturalistic theory in general, was not only extreme, but also dangerous in that it made what is partially true appear as the whole truth. Unquestionably men are in part governed by conditions and forces beyond their control, but the bald assertion that determinism dominates all things has not been substantiated. The age-old controversy between necessity and free will has

The Fault  
with the  
Naturalistic  
Theory.

not yet been settled, and it is doubtful whether any one has improved upon Dr. Johnson's celebrated comment that all theory is against the freedom of the will and all experience for it. We know that men are greatly affected by heredity and environment; yet we know also that they can overcome inherited disabilities and triumph over unfavorable surroundings. And although the beast is in man, the angel, as Pascal pointed out, is in him as well.

In practice naturalism does not always go so far as in Zola's theory, and it is often difficult to distinguish clearly between naturalism and brutal realism. In re-

Conclusion. cent years there has been an enormous output of realistic books, many of them, to a greater or less extent, naturalistic; and, in the case of books like these, which represent such varying degrees and qualities of realism, definite classification is often practically impossible. In general, however, we may affirm *that literary naturalism tends to paint the bestial, the repulsive, and even the obscene in such a way as to give them undue prominence in the broad picture of life.*

## QUESTIONS

1. Of what may naturalism be considered an outgrowth?
2. What is the general relation between naturalism and realism?
3. What is the relation between naturalism and romanticism?
4. What part did deism have in the genesis of naturalism?
5. What part did scientific materialism have?
6. From what scientific writer did Zola derive much of his inspiration?
7. What were the chief points in Zola's theory?
8. In what way is Zola's position directly opposed to that of



the humanists? 9. What faults can you find with naturalism as exemplified by the theory and practice of Zola?

## EXERCISES

## 1. Here is a definition of naturalism:

Naturalism then is an excessive form of Realism and is usually considered as possessing the following characteristics. First, it allows a still larger variety of subjects, emphasizing the lower and coarser forms of life; it presents this material in a fashion which is often revolting; it rejects ideality, it minimizes heart-interest and plot-interest in favor of "facts" and notation; it magnifies the study of the industries and seeks to apply to fiction the processes of the natural sciences; from these, taken in their application to heredity and environment, it draws its conception of life—deterministic, fatalistic, essentially pessimistic. The laws of brute Nature are viewed as grimly controlling the destinies of helpless and hopeless man.<sup>3</sup>

Show step by step how this summary agrees or disagrees with the conclusions we have formed in our own examination of naturalism. Does it omit something we considered of prime importance? If so, what?

2. Men at some time are masters of their fates;  
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.<sup>4</sup>

What statements in the chapter just studied do these lines recall to your mind? Show how the sentiments expressed in this quotation are at variance with those of Zola and his followers.

<sup>3</sup> Nitze and Dargan, *A History of French Literature*. New York (Henry Holt and Company), 1922, p. 623.

<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*. I, 2. 139-142.

## CHAPTER X

### PROSE, VERSE, AND POETRY

WE have seen how literary works can be roughly classified as subjective or objective, and as classical, romantic, idealistic, realistic, or naturalistic; it remains for us to study their classification into prose, verse, and poetry. In everyday speech we loosely use the word *poetry* as a kind of blanket term to include all writings which do not belong to prose; but here we must distinguish between poetry and verse, for though poetry, if we use the term strictly, is always verse, either regular or free, verse is not always poetry. Let us first study the difference between prose and verse, and let us begin by comparing two descriptions of Cleopatra's arrival in Cilicia, when she came to meet Mark Antony. The first, taken from the translation of Plutarch's *Lives* usually called Dryden's, represents prose; the second, which comes from Dryden's tragedy *All for Love*, represents verse. The excerpt from *All for Love* has also a quality which makes it something more than verse. It is poetry, but we shall leave the question of poetry out of consideration for the present:

She [Cleopatra] came sailing up the river Cydnus, in a barge with gilded stern and outspread sails of purple, while oars of silver beat time to the music of flutes and fifes and harps. She herself lay all along, under a canopy of cloth of

gold, dressed as Venus in a picture, and beautiful young boys, like painted Cupids, stood on each side to fan her. Her maids were dressed like sea nymphs and graces, some steering at the rudder, some working at the ropes. The perfumes diffused themselves from the vessel to the shore, which was covered with multitudes, part following the galley up the river on either bank, part running out of the city to see the sight. The market-place was quite emptied, and Antony at last was left alone sitting upon the tribunal; while the word went through all the multitude, that Venus was come to feast with Bacchus, for the common good of Asia.

Her galley down the silver Cydnus rowed,  
The tackling silk, the streamers waved with gold;  
The gentle winds were lodged in purple sails:  
Her nymphs, like Nereids, round her couch were placed;  
Where she, another sea-born Venus, lay.

She lay, and leant her cheek upon her hand,  
And cast a look so languishingly sweet,  
As if, secure of all beholders' hearts,  
Neglecting, she could take them: boys like Cupids,  
Stood fanning, with their painted wings, the winds  
That played about her face. But if she smiled,  
A darting glory seemed to blaze abroad,  
That men's despairing eyes were never wearied.

Both of these passages have all the prerequisites of literature; but, at the same time, we recognize that in one respect they are different. When we read the second aloud, we perceive that the sounds follow in such a way as to produce a regularity of rhythm lacking in the first. Although there is rhythm of a kind in the first passage, the cadences are irregular. The difference here so easily felt is the

The  
Essential  
Difference.

essential difference between prose and verse. However, we must look into the matter a little more closely.

We know that the rhythm of music is regular. We also know that verse is and apparently always has been closely associated with music. Frequently, if not always, the epics of antiquity were sung or chanted to the accompaniment of the lyre.

**Verse and Music.**

The popular ballads, many of which were handed down orally from generation to generation for ages before they were committed to writing, were sung and in some places still are sung. And our songs and hymns of today are verses set to music. This close association, which implies a peculiar adaptability of verse to musical accompaniment, suggests that there must be a similarity between the rhythm of music and the rhythm of verse, and that the same conditions which produce regularity in musical rhythm may have something to do with the regularity of verse rhythm. Let us follow the suggestion and see whether an examination of the rhythmical structure of music will help us to a better understanding of the rhythmical structure of verse.

In the familiar song "Calm as the Night" <sup>1</sup> strict regularity of rhythm is made unmistakably apparent by the

**Regularity of Rhythm in Music.**

fact that a series of six quarter notes occurs in nearly all the measures of the piano accompaniment. These notes mark the time for us as clearly as if they were counting one, two, three, four, five, six. Here are the opening bars of the song:

<sup>1</sup> The music is by Carl Bohm, the English poetry by Nathan Haskell Dole. Permission to quote from the song granted by the publishers, G. Schirmer, Inc., New York.

Calm as the night,

The first system of a musical score in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass). The vocal line begins with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a half note G4. The piano accompaniment features a flowing eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a steady quarter-note bass line in the left hand. The system concludes with a double bar line.

Deep as the sea, — Thy love for

The second system continues the musical piece. The vocal line has a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a half note G4, and a quarter note F#4. The piano accompaniment continues with its eighth-note pattern, featuring a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The system ends with a double bar line.

me — should be. —

The third system concludes the phrase. The vocal line has a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a half note G4, and a quarter note F#4. The piano accompaniment continues with its eighth-note pattern, featuring a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The system ends with a double bar line.

These musical characters or notes represent sounds and measure their relative duration. The notes are not strung along helter-skelter, but are arranged in groups or bars in such fashion that the total amount of time required to sound all those included in any one bar is exactly the same as the total amount expended in sounding those in any other. The first bar of the melody, for example, contains a dotted half note, which calls for three counts; a half note, which calls for two; and a quarter note, which calls for one. The sum total of counts is six. The second bar of the melody contains only one note, a dotted whole note, which requires six counts. Again the sum total is six. When a musician sings this melody or plays it upon an instrument, he accents the first note in each bar and thus makes his listeners conscious of the recurrence of the time groups. Such measuring of sound duration into equal time groups is what produces the rhythm of music. The accent is important, of course, because it marks the rhythm; but all rhythm is ultimately dependent upon time.

When we sing verses, the quantity of the syllables, that is, the time prolongation, is for the moment fixed. We lengthen or shorten the syllable sounds to make their duration accord with the duration of the corresponding musical notes. In other words, the music imposes fixed quantity upon the verse syllables. When we sing the words *calm as the night* to the music which we have just been examining, we give *calm* three times the duration of *the*, *as* twice the duration of *the*, and *night* six times the duration of *the*. We do so, however, only in singing;

Time Basis  
of Rhythm.

Fixed  
Quantity in  
Singing.

we should never read the words in just that way.

If the quantity of syllables in English were fixed regularly and inherently just as it is fixed artificially in the case of verses set to music, English verse rhythms would

be exactly the same as the rhythms of music; for we could arrange syllables in relation to the natural word accent so as to form measures parallel to musical bars. But

Absence of Fixed Quantity in Verse. in English the quantity of syllables is not fixed. Although we have vowels which we call long and others which we call short, the relative duration of the longs and the shorts shows no fixed ratio. The *a* in *father*, to cite a specific case, is long; the *e* in *ben* is short. We sound the *a* slightly longer when we say *father* than we sound the *e* when we say *ben*, but we do not consistently sound it one and a half times as long, let us say, or twice as long. And just as the quantity of these two vowels is not fixed except that the prolongation in the one case is somewhat greater than that in the other, so the quantity of the syllables built upon them, *fa* and *ben*, is not fixed. We have then no fixed quantities to help us in the writing of verse or to make us bring out the rhythm unmistakably when we read verse. For this lack of fixed quantities, however, we find compensation.

In all of us there is, to a greater or less extent, a rhythmizing instinct. From this instinct comes the tendency of young children to mark the rhythm with

The Rhythmizing Instinct. exaggerated emphasis when they repeat their nursery rhymes; and from the same source

comes the habit of emphasizing the rhythm when we recite verses which form part of certain games. A typical illustration is afforded by the game "Pease

porridge hot," in which the recitation is accompanied by a clapping of hands which produces a strict regularity of rhythm:

Pease porridge hot  
 Pease porridge cold  
 Pease porridge in the pot  
 Nine days old.

When we recite these lines, we instinctively prolong the sound of certain syllables, making the ratio between the longer and the shorter syllable durations approximately two to one. If we use the symbol known as the breve to indicate each short sound, a caret to indicate a pause equal to the time of the breve, and a macron to designate twice the time of the breve, we can represent the rhythmical scheme of the lines thus:

˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ^ ^ |  
 ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ^ ^ |  
 ˘ ˘ ˘ | ˘ ˘ ˘ ^ |  
 ˘ — | ˘ ^ ^ |

This is the rhythm of music, and yet there is no musical accompaniment to make a lengthening and shortening of syllable sounds necessary; we are reciting, not singing. Our rhythmizing instinct, here given full play, has imposed what is practically a geometrical relation between longs and shorts upon sounds which in ordinary speech only approximate such regularity.

The same instinct influences the reading of verse in general, though it does not usually carry us to such an extreme. When we repeat words which are so arranged that their normal pronunciation approximates a musi-



cal scheme, our instinctive tendency to rhythmize causes us to lengthen a sound slightly here, shorten another slightly there, and even to insert pauses with the result that our reading gives the effect of a regular rhythm. In reciting verse we do just what is done in singing, except that we do not push the lengthening and the shortening so far. The extent to which we modify the duration of syllables varies, of course, with different readers. With some it is so slight that we hardly feel the rhythm at all; with others it is so great that the rhythm becomes very strongly stressed. For instance, the distinguished poet, Mr. T. S. Eliot, goes to the latter extreme. When Mr. Eliot reads his own verses aloud, the listener can actually beat time to the rhythm. Yet despite this wide variation it is safe to say that most readers who have a keen sense of rhythm, instinctively—and, for the most part, unconsciously—lengthen and shorten syllables enough to divide their lines into measures in such a way that the total amount of time given to any one measure, whatever be the relative duration of the syllables therein contained, is made more or less equal to the total amount allotted to every other. The rhythm of verse is thus comparable to the rhythm of music, and both are ultimately dependent upon time.<sup>2</sup>

In music, as we have seen, the grouping of sounds, ac-

<sup>2</sup> Any English verses in which the reader instinctively inserts pauses corresponding to rests in music will furnish evidence that our verse rhythms are dependent upon time. A good illustration of this dependency appears on page 101 of Sidney Lanier's *The Science of English Verse*, New York (Charles Scribner's Sons), 1901. It is Lanier's schematization of a familiar stanza by Tennyson. We must remember, of course, that the notes and rests do not exactly measure the relative prolongation of the syllable sounds, which are not fixed in their duration, but that the musical bars do approximately indicate the rhythm as it is felt ordinarily

cording to duration, into measures all of which consume the same amount of time is indicated by the accent. In

**The Function of the Accent.** English verse the same necessary grouping is likewise indicated by the recurrence of an accent; and here the accent is even more important because here, as we have also seen, the time distribution within the groups is less regular, and the grouping would not be so easily perceived without the aid of the accent.<sup>3</sup> That is why English verse is commonly termed accentual. The musical accent falls normally, if not necessarily, upon the first beat in every

when the lines are read. Without the insertion of pauses the series "Break, break, break," would simply give three successive accents, and there would be no rhythm:



Scientific experiments which measure and record the amount of time a particular reader allots to each syllable tend to prove that the accented syllable is normally sustained longer than the unaccented. However, these experiments show a good deal of variation in the total amounts of time consumed in uttering the different measures. Theoretically, as we have seen, the total amount of time given one measure should be approximately the same as the total amount given to every other one, but it is to be expected that some readers should depart considerably from the theoretical norm. For an interesting discussion of this subject, see Paul Franklin Baum, *The Principles of English Versification*. Cambridge (The Harvard University Press), 1923, pp. 56 ff.

<sup>3</sup> In the music of the organ there is comparatively little accent, but the relative duration of the sounds is so definitely measured that the time groups can easily be distinguished.

bar; the verse accent, however, may or may not fall on the first syllable of each measure or foot. The iambic measure, for example, in which a large proportion of our greatest poetry is written, carries the accent on the second syllable; nevertheless, the division into time groups is none the less distinct. The function of the accent in verse will be made clear if we schematize the pattern of the accents in our excerpt from *All for Love*, in which the series of stresses do not follow the musical order because the rhythm happens to be iambic. We can place accent marks over the stressed syllables and let *x*'s stand for those which are unstressed. As we work out the scheme of accents, let us also indicate the approximate time scheme, representing each of the shorter time quantities by the numeral 1 and each of the longer by 1+.

1	1+	1	1+	1	1+	1	1+	1	1+
x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/
Her gal-	ley	down	the sil-	ver	Cyd-	nus	rowed		

1	1+	1	1+	1	1+	1	1+	1	1+
x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/
The tack-	ling	silk,	the stream-	ers	waved	with	gold;		

1	1+	1	1+	1	1+	1	1+	1	1+
x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/
The gen-	tle	winds	were	lodged	in pur-	ple	sails:		

1	1+	1	1+	1	1+	1	1+	1	1+
x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/
Her nymphs,	like Ne-	reids,	round	her couch	were	placed;			

1	1+	1	1+	1	1+	1	1+	1	1+
x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/	x	/
Where she	an-	o-	ther	sea-	born	Ve-	nus,	lay.	

As we are well aware, most English words have a fixed accent, whether they are used in verse or in prose. For example, we say *gal'ley*, and not *gal-ley'*; *pur'ple*, and not *pur-ple'*. And if we examine the passage as it is now marked, we see that the natural word accent here coincides consistently with the metrical accent, or the accent which divides the lines into measures. This coincidence is characteristic of English verse in general, though once in a while a line may contain measures which are exceptions—measures in which the word accent and the metrical accent do not fall on the same syllable. Also we notice that in this passage the accents regularly fall on the syllables which naturally have, or to which we have instinctively given, a slight prolongation. And here we find exemplified another characteristic of English verse, though we sometimes meet with exceptions which are usually more apparent than real. Since the accents fall on the more prolonged syllables, the accentual system of marking parallels the time system and thus indirectly indicates the relative time values. For that reason and because the accentual notation is the one customarily used and is more convenient, we shall henceforth mark off or, as the process is called technically, “scan” verses according to the accentual system; but in so doing we must remember that rhythm is fundamentally a matter of time and that the function of the accent—a necessary function, to be sure—is merely to break up the time flow into bars.

Verse will scan because its syllables are so arranged in relation to accent that our rhythmizing instinct enables us readily to interpret their sequence rhythmically, whatever the absolute duration of their sounds may be.

But what of prose? If we return to the prose passage which described Cleopatra's arrival in Cilicia, we shall

see that the accents do not break it up into measures parallel to bars in music. By a violent and artificial lengthening and shortening of syllables, we might indeed force a musical rhythm into the passage; but we could not do so by reading it naturally. The passage is prose because its syllables are so arranged that they do not lend themselves to the production of a regular rhythm when read naturally. Verse, then, differs from prose in that the normal reading of verse brings out a rhythm comparable in regularity to that of music, while the normal reading of prose does not. Verse will scan; prose will not.<sup>4</sup>

How Verse  
and Prose  
Differ in  
Rhythm.

The rhythmical arrangement of words to form such regular measures as we have been studying is called meter, and language in which the words exhibit an arrangement into regularly

Free  
Verse.

<sup>4</sup> Now and then, we come across passages which look like exceptions, but these can usually be explained as bits of verse accidentally mixed into prose. Under the influence of strong emotion a writer may sometimes unconsciously shift into a regular rhythm. A good illustration can be found in part of the sentimental description of Little Nell's death in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*:

For she was dead. There upon her little bed she lay at rest. The solemn stillness was no marvel now.

This can readily be blocked off into verse form:

For she was dead.  
There upon her little bed  
She lay at rest.  
The solemn stillness was  
No marvel now.

Here the rhythm is practically regular, and we have a passage of verse. Although such passages are found in prose, they are really not prose at all, but verse; and to let much of this regular rhythm find its way into prose is generally condemned as faulty art.

rhythmical measures is said to have meter or to be metrical. Between metrical verse or verse proper and ordinary prose there is a literary form known as free verse. Free verse has a kind of rhythm less regular than the rhythm of metrical verse but more regular than the vague cadences of ordinary prose.

At first sight it is not always easy to distinguish free verse from prose blocked off in verse form. Certainly most of us at first reading would take the following passage for prose:

The Rhythm of Free Verse.	When I peruse the conquered fame of heroes and victories of mighty generals, I do not envy the generals, nor the Presi- dent in his Presidency, nor the rich in his great house, but when I hear of the brotherhood of lovers, how it was with them, how together through life, through dangers, odium, unchang- ing, long and long, through youth and through middle and old age, how unfaltering, how affectionate and faithful they were, then I am pensive—I hastily walk away filled with the bitterest envy.
------------------------------------	---

But look at it again as Walt Whitman wrote it. The words are unchanged; it is simply blocked off differently.

When I peruse the conquer'd fame of heroes and the vic-  
tories of mighty generals, I do not envy the generals,  
Nor the President in his Presidency, nor the rich in his great  
house,  
But when I hear of the brotherhood of lovers, how it was  
with them,  
How together through life, through dangers, odium, un-  
changing, long and long,

Through youth and through middle and old age, how unfaltering, how affectionate and faithful they were,  
Then I am pensive—I hastily walk away  
Fill'd with the bitterest envy.<sup>5</sup>

When we read this same passage, with the words divided into line-like groups as they are here, if we tune our ears to the rhythm, we find that the thought is uttered in certain large rhythmic surges which remind us of sea waves pounding the shore. When we stand by the sea, we notice that some waves are higher than others and wash further up on the beach. Now and then, we have to run back. And we observe that each wave rolls up in broken curves with little ripples or wavelets disturbing its surface. Endless variation is there; yet always a steady rhythmic beating of water upon the sands. It was just this irregular rhythm of the waves that Whitman was trying to imitate. He himself says:

Had I the choice to tally greatest bards,  
To limn their portraits, stately, beautiful, . . .  
Meter or wit the best, or choice conceit to wield in perfect  
rime, delight of singers;  
These, these, oh sea, all these I'd gladly barter,  
Would you the undulation of one wave, its trick to me  
transfer,  
Or breathe one breath of yours upon my verse,  
And leave its odor there! . . .<sup>6</sup>

Of meter in much of Whitman's work there is none, but there are large free-swinging rhythmic periods.

<sup>5</sup> From *Leaves of Grass*.

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that in these lines, although Whitman is describing the irregular rhythm which he wishes to imitate, his emotion gets the better of him and he lapses into strict meter.

Through the influence of Walt Whitman and others, a great deal has been written in free verse. The champions of this non-metrical form usually maintain that meter is a kind of strait-jacket. In other words, they

think that a poet who sticks to the regular verse structure may often have to give up a word, though it may express precisely the idea which he has in mind, simply because

it will not fit into the meter, and that his work consequently loses beauty and exactness of expression. The opponents of the free verse theory answer that numerous liberties and substitutions have always been allowed in metrical composition and that the true artist by taking advantage of these and by otherwise bending his medium to his purpose can secure freedom without discarding meter. They would cite a passage like this in which Shakespeare without giving up meter makes the heated and indignant Hotspur speak in verse with the freedom of conversational prose:

My liege, I did deny no prisoners,  
 But I remember, when the fight was done,  
 When I was dry with rage and extreme toil,  
 Breathless and faint, leaning upon my sword,  
 Came there a certain lord, neat, trimly dress'd  
 Fresh as a bridegroom; and his chin new reap'd  
 Showed like a stubble-land at harvest-home.  
 He was perfumed like a milliner,  
 And 'twixt his finger and his thumb he held  
 A pouncet-box, which ever and anon  
 He gave his nose and took't away again;  
 Who therewith angry, when it came next there,  
 Took it in snuff; and still he smil'd and talk'd,



And as the soldiers bore dead bodies by,  
He called them untaught knaves, unmannerly,  
To bring a slovenly, unhandsome corse  
Betwixt the wind and his nobility.  
With many holiday and lady terms  
He questioned me; among the rest, demanded  
My prisoners in your majesty's behalf.

But granting that free verse has the advantage of allowing greater liberty, and granting that it is, in its own way, rhythmical, how are we to distinguish its rhythm from that of prose? Amy Lowell's Definition. Amy Lowell, in the preface to her *Sword Blades and Poppy Seeds*, attempts to make the difference in rhythm clear:

Many of the poems in this volume are written in what the French call "Vers Libre," a nomenclature more suited to French use and to French versification than to ours. I prefer to call them poems in "unrhymed cadence," for that conveys their exact meaning to English ears. They are built upon "organic rhythm," or the rhythm of the speaking voice with its necessity for breathing, rather than upon a strict metrical system. They differ from ordinary prose rhythms by being more curved, and containing more stress. The stress, and exceedingly marked curve, of any regular meter is easily perceived. These poems, built upon cadence, are more subtle, but the laws they follow are not less fixed. Merely chopping prose lines into lengths does not produce cadence; it is constructed upon mathematical and absolute laws of balance and time.<sup>7</sup>

What Amy Lowell says may indeed be true enough, but to the uninitiated the "unrhymed cadences" of free

<sup>7</sup> By permission of and special arrangement with Houghton Mifflin Company.

verse often sound very much like the rhythms of prose.

Frequent  
Similarity  
to Prose  
Cadences.

Here are two passages quoted by Professor Lowes in his *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*. Which represents free verse, and which represents prose?

Her face was like the after-sunset  
Across a rose-garden,  
With the wings of an eagle  
Poised outspread on the light.

The light of her face falls from its flower,  
as a hyacinth,  
hidden in a far valley,  
perishes upon burnt grass.<sup>8</sup>

The passages are patently similar in their rhythmical structure; yet the first is from the prose of George Meredith, but set off in verse form, while the second is from a poem in free verse by "H.D." <sup>9</sup>

To such comparisons of single excerpts too much weight should not be given, but they do at least show that no hard and fast line can be drawn between prose and free verse. As we pass from free verse to prose, the rhythm gradually becomes more irregular, and there must be a kind of zero point at which prose and free verse merge. The nearer we come to this theoretical zero point, the more difficult it is to decide whether we are dealing with the rhythms of prose, or with the "unrhymed cadences" of free verse. Of course, those who write in unmetrical language indicate that they intend

<sup>8</sup> Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1919, p. 277.

<sup>9</sup> Hilda Doolittle.

their work to be free verse when they block it off in verse form, but whether compositions of this kind are or are not what they purport to be each of us must decide for himself. We need not trouble ourselves here with trying to classify productions which lie in the debatable territory between verse proper and prose. What is important is that we form a clear idea of the distinction between the extremes occupied by regular verse at one end of the scale and ordinary prose at the other. Between those extremes the distinction is definite and sharp; verse will scan, and prose will not.

Poetry, which to avoid confusion we have thus far taken no account of, differs from prose just as verse differs from prose; for all poetry is verse of some kind, either metrical or free. But how does  
Verse and Poetry. poetry differ from mere verse? To this question no adequate concise answer can be given. The difference between poetry and commonplace verse can be illustrated better than it can be defined.

The lines from *Childe Harold* in which Byron gives his celebrated description of the dying gladiator represent poetry of a high order. The vanquished fighter pays no heed to the shout "which hail'd the wretch who won":

He heard it, but he heeded not—his eyes  
 Were with his heart and that was far away;  
 He reck'd not of the life he lost nor prize,  
 But where his rude hut by the Danube lay,  
*There* were his young barbarians all at play,  
*There* was their Dacian mother—he, their sire,  
 Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday.

The opening stanza of "Yankee Doodle," on the other hand, represents the extreme of pedestrian verse, indeed verse that is nothing more than doggerel:

O Yankee Doodle came to town,  
A ridin' on a pony;  
He stuck a feather in his hat  
And called him "macaroni."

Both of these passages are written in metrical verse; yet in the first we recognize qualities utterly lacking in the second. The first represents not only poetry, but great poetry. The second does not belong to poetry; strictly speaking, it does not even belong to literature. Adapted from a British source, it has survived chiefly because it is part of a song that chanced to become the "nursery rhyme of the American Army."

The lines from Byron have all the requisite characteristics of literature; the lines from "Yankee Doodle" in themselves have none. Any appeal to thought, emotion, and imagination which "Yankee Doodle" may exercise is derived from its association, as a song, with our national life. These observations lead us directly to the thought that poetry may be nothing more than verse which is literature; and it is true that if we use the word *poetry* in its widest application, any work of true literature written in verse is a poem. For instance, much didactic verse and much personal satire, far different in quality from the kind of thing which Byron's lines exemplify, are frequently included within the confines of poetry. Of such character is Dryden's *MacFlecknoe*, a per-

**Broadest  
Application  
of the Term  
*Poetry*.**

sonal attack upon the dramatist, Shadwell.<sup>10</sup> The first eighteen lines illustrate the general tone of the piece:

All human things are subject to decay,  
And when fate summons, monarchs must obey.  
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young  
Was called to empire, and had govern'd long;  
In prose and verse, was own'd, without dispute,  
Thro' all the realms of *Nonsense*, absolute.  
This aged prince, now flourishing in peace,  
And blest with issue of a large increase;  
Worn out with business, did at length debate  
To settle the succession of the State;  
And, pond'ring which of all his sons was fit  
To reign, and wage immortal war with wit,  
Cried: "'T is resolv'd, for nature pleads, that he  
Should only rule, who most resembles me.  
Sh—— alone my perfect image bears,  
Mature in dullness from his tender years:  
Sh—— alone, of all my sons, is he  
Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.

But we also give to the word *poetry* a narrower application, using it with reference only to such verse as is typified by the passage from *Childe Harold*. In verse of that kind the power to move us, a power which all true literature must possess, at least to some extent, is tremendously intensified, and we are filled with a sense of something which we cannot adequately describe—something which for lack of a better term we may call mystical elevation.

A More  
Restricted  
Use of the  
Term.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Flecknoe was an Irish poet, dramatist, and miscellaneous writer who was ridiculed by Andrew Marvell in a poem called "Flecknoe." Dryden satirizes Shadwell by making him in a literary sense, *Mac-Flecknoe*, or the *son* of Flecknoe.

It may be that this mystical elevation results solely from an extreme heightening of the appeal to thought, emotion, and imagination which is characteristic of literature. If so, the word *poetry* as we are using it now simply means great poetry; and we can continue to say that poetry is nothing but literature put into verse form, if in this case we mean great literature. Other things, however, may enter into the reckoning. Thus it may be that poetry—and we are dealing with the more restricted application—differs from ordinary literature not only in degree, but also in kind. In these matters we cannot dogmatize. Sometimes in prose and sometimes in verse we can perceive a quality which we designate as poetic. Verse which possesses that quality we call poetry, but the ultimate nature of poetry we cannot explain.

We do know, nevertheless, that works of literature which can produce a feeling of mystical elevation, be they written in prose or in verse, appeal to the imagination particularly with intensified power, and most often appeal to thought and the emotions rather through the agency of the imagination than directly. In the following selection from Carlyle, the third sentence, in which we clearly recognize poetic quality, not only illustrates the statement with which the passage begins, but also by striking first at the imagination through simile brings Carlyle's message home to us with increased power, making us think and feel with greater intensity:

Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life-purpose; he has found it

and will follow it! How, as a free-flowing channel, dug and torn by noble force through the sour mud-swamp of one's existence, like an ever-deepening river there, it runs and flows; draining off the sour festering water gradually from the root of the remotest grass-blade; making, instead of pestilential swamp, a green fruitful meadow with its clear-flowing stream.<sup>11</sup>

And here are four lines from Chaucer, typical of great poetry, which likewise incite thought and stir emotion indirectly:

Amonges thise povre folk ther dwelte a man  
Which that was holden povrest of hem alle;  
But hye god som tyme senden can  
His grace into a litel oxes stalle.<sup>12</sup>

Chaucer here suggests the picture of the Christ child lying in the manger, and thus brings up the whole conception of the Christ life and what it means. The result is mystical elevation. Of language like this, language which is poetic in the restricted sense—we shall make a more detailed study in the next chapter.

*We have found that between the extremes represented by ordinary prose and metrical verse respectively there are forms which are difficult to classify, but that ordinary prose, which will not scan, can easily be distinguished from metrical verse, which will. And*

<sup>11</sup> *Past and Present*, Bk. III, ch. 11. The poetic quality apparent in prose passages like this has frequently led people to confuse prose with poetry. Shelley, in his *Defence of Poetry*, says that Plato was "essentially" a poet; but Shelley confuses poetic style with poetry. The works of Plato are not poems, for they are not written in verse.

<sup>12</sup> The vowels in italics should not be sounded; all others should be pronounced. In Chaucer the final *e* is usually pronounced unless it is followed by another vowel or an aspirate *h*. See "The Clerk's Tale," lines 204-207.

*we have observed that between the extremes represented in turn by mere verse and such verse as we have in mind*

*when we use the term "poetry" in its restricted meaning there are metrical compositions which we cannot classify with confidence, but that mere verse can be distinguished from great poetry because mere verse lacks the power to exalt.*

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the essential difference between prose and verse?
2. How is verse affiliated with music?
3. What is the basis of rhythm?
4. Why does the quantity of the syllables in verse become fixed when we sing it?
5. Is there any such thing as fixed quantity in verse when we do not sing it?
6. What is meant by the "rhythmizing instinct"?
7. Where does it frequently show itself?
8. What effect does our rhythmizing instinct have on the quantity of the syllables when we read verse?
9. What is the function of the accent in verse?
10. Why is English verse commonly called "accentual"?
11. Why does the accentual system of marking the rhythm in verse parallel the time scheme?
12. What is free verse?
13. What fault do the champions of free verse find with metrical verse?
14. What can you say in defense of meter? What is the gist of Amy Lowell's definition of free verse?
15. Are free verse rhythms always easy to distinguish from prose rhythms?
16. Can the difference between mere verse and poetry be clearly defined?
17. Can you illustrate the difference?
18. What may be included as poetry when we give the word its broadest meaning?
19. What is the peculiar power of those works which we have in mind when we use the word *poetry* in its restrictive meaning?
20. Do prose works ever have the same peculiar power?
21. What effect do works of litera-



ture have on the imagination if they are endowed with this power?

### EXERCISES

1. In criticizing a rhymed couplet form in which each line contains exactly eight syllables, Leigh Hunt says:

Coleridge saw the mistake which had been made with regard to this measure, and restored it to the beautiful freedom of which it was capable, by calling to mind the liberties allowed its old musical professors, the minstrels, and dividing it by *time* instead of *syllables*;—by the *beat of four* into which you might get as many syllables as you could, instead of allotting eight syllables to the poor time, whatever it might have to say. He varied it further with alternate rhymes and stanzas, with rests and omissions precisely analogous to those in music, and rendered it altogether worthy to utter the manifold thoughts and feelings of himself and his lady Christabel. He even ventures, with an exquisite sense of solemn strangeness and license (for there is witchcraft going forward), to introduce a couplet of blank verse itself as mystically and beautifully modulated as anything in the music of Glück or Weber.<sup>13</sup>

What statements do you find here to support the theory of verse you have just been studying? What specific words in Leigh Hunt's paragraph remind you that Coleridge was a poet of the Romantic Movement and what characteristics of nineteenth-century romanticism do those words make you recall?

2. In the same essay we also find this paragraph, which bears upon one of the problems we have been discussing:

With regard to the principle of Variety in Uniformity by which verse ought to be modulated, and one-ness of impression diversely produced, it has been contended by some, that Poetry need not be written in verse at all; that prose is as good a medium, provided poetry be conveyed through it; and that to think otherwise is to

<sup>13</sup> Leigh Hunt, "An Answer to the Question, What is Poetry?" *Imagination and Fancy*. New York (Wiley and Putnam), 1845, p. 39.

confound letter with spirit, or form with essence. But the opinion is a prosaical mistake. Fitness and unfitness for *song*, or metrical excitement, just make all the difference between a poetical and prosaical subject; and the reason why verse is necessary to the form of poetry, is, that the perfection of poetical spirit demands it; that the circle of enthusiasm, beauty, and power, is incomplete without it. I do not mean to say that a poet can never show himself a poet in prose; but that, being one, his desire and necessity will be to write in verse; and that, if he were unwilling to do so, he would not, and could not, deserve his title. Verse to the true poet is no clog. It is idly called a trammel and a difficulty. It is a help. It springs from the same enthusiasm as the rest of his impulses, and is necessary to their satisfaction and effect. Verse is no more a clog than the condition of rushing upward is a clog to fire, or than the roundness and order of the globe we live on is a clog to the freedom and variety that abound within its sphere. Verse is no dominator over the poet, except inasmuch as the bond is reciprocal, and the poet dominates over the verse. They are lovers playfully challenging each other's rule, and delighted equally to rule and to obey. Verse is the final proof to the poet that his mastery over his art is complete.<sup>14</sup>

How can the statements in this extract be used to argue against the contention that meter is a kind of strait-jacket?

3. This has to do with free verse:

It is easy to be free by simply declining to engage a medium offering a resistance of its own; but to be free by virtue of the power to conquer with your passion everything that stands against it in the genuine utilities of an art, is a freedom worthy of the boast.<sup>15</sup>

In your own words explain the meaning of this. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

<sup>14</sup> Leigh Hunt, *Imagination and Fancy*. New York (Wiley and Putnam), 1845, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Max Eastman, *Journalism versus Art*. New York (Alfred A. Knopf), 1916, p. 101.

4. Here are some satirical lines by Dr. Samuel Johnson, written in strictly regular verse:

I put my hat upon my head  
And walked into the Strand,  
And there I met another man  
Whose hat was in his hand.

Why would you say without hesitation that this is not poetry? What would you call it?

5. Shelley affirmed that Plato was a poet. Plato's *Apology* ends with these words which are assigned to Socrates:

And I may make of them this one request; when my sons have grown up, I would ask you, gentlemen, to worry them as I have worried you, if they seem to care more for money and such things than virtue, and if they claim to be something when they are naught. Do you rebuke them as I have rebuked you for not caring about what they should, and for thinking themselves something when they are of nothing worth. If you do this, both I and my sons shall have received justice at your hands.—And now it is time to depart hence, I to die and you to live; but which of us goes to the better fate no one knoweth save only God.<sup>16</sup>

Do you find that the quality lacking in the lines quoted above, in Exercise 4, is present here? Then why is this not poetry?

<sup>16</sup> Translated by Paul Elmer More in *The Judgment of Socrates*. Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), p. 67.

## CHAPTER XI

### POETIC LANGUAGE

AS we turn to the subject of poetic language, we naturally recall certain statements made by Wordsworth in the famous preface to the edition of *Lyrical Ballads* published in 1800. For one thing, he says:

It may be safely affirmed that there neither is, nor can be, any *essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition.

By *metrical composition*, as he tells us in a footnote, he means poetry. He is, therefore, denying that there is any essential difference between the language of prose and that of poetry, from which statement we might be led to infer that he meant to deny the existence of any such thing as poetic language.

Wordsworth, however, was rebelling against a conventional diction current in the poetry of the eighteenth century; he was crossing swords with those who held that certain words are appropriate to poetry, while others are suitable only for prose. Here is an example of the kind of diction which Wordsworth was attacking:

Ah, what avail the beauties Nature wore?  
Fair Daphne's dead, and Beauty is no more!  
For her the flocks refuse their verdant food,  
The thirsty heifers shun the gliding flood.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From Pope's pastoral, "Winter," or "Daphne."

We can agree with Wordsworth that artificial language like this, in which *verdant food* takes the place of *grass* and *gliding flood* is used for *river*, does not constitute poetry. But language is something

Poetic Use  
of Words.

more than diction. In thinking of language we take into account not only words, but also the way in which those words are associated to form a context; and it is easy to prove that the most commonplace words of everyday speech can be worked into a context which will affect us more powerfully than ordinary prose. Of this fact the lines quoted from Chaucer in the preceding chapter give sufficient illustration. The words *little*, *ox*, and *stall* belong to the stock and store of words made commonplace by familiar daily use; yet, as we have already seen, Chaucer welded them into a particular context in such a way as to make them excite the imagination far more than they do ordinarily. In reality Wordsworth's statements do not invalidate our assumption that there is such a thing as poetic language. So far as individual words themselves are concerned, there may be no difference between the language of prose and that of poetry, but in the use of those words there is a difference which is unmistakable.

The ability of poetic language to work forcefully upon the imagination is derived in part from the generous use of rhetorical figures. These figures result from

Rhetorical  
Figures in  
Poetic  
Style.

the writer's imaginative activity, and often they stimulate a similar activity in the reader. Thus when Virgil speaks of the dawn as "Aurora blushing in the east," he employs the figure known as personification; he has imagined a natural phenomenon to be a goddess, and the

reader must go through the same mental process in order to grasp the full meaning of the phrase. Since rhetorical figures are capable of setting the imagination to work, they are used freely in poetic style; and, as a result, the idea that a free use of such figures distinguishes language which is poetic from language which is not has become more or less widespread. But it is a conclusion which can be accepted only with reservations.

The language of ordinary conversation is full of what we might call fossilized figures. For instance, when we say that Mr. Smith provides a good table, we mean that he provides good food, and we are employing the figure called *metonymy*, by which one word is substituted for another which it suggests. When this use of *table* for *food* was new, it doubtless appealed to the imagination but now, worn by constant repetition, it has lost its effect. In a similar way, thousands of figures have become so familiar through daily use that we lose sight of their true nature.<sup>2</sup> Whenever figurative expressions for any reason become conventional or trite, they no longer appeal to us as poetic. On the other hand, those which are fresh and arresting are poetic because they kindle the imagination. We can say then that the presence of

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the figurative phrases of great poets are caught up and repeated by every hack writer until they become trite. In "L'Allegro" Milton speaks of a beautiful lady as "the cynosure of neighboring eyes." The word *cynosure* comes to us from the Greek. "In Greek," says Professor Skeat, "it meant 'dog's tail,' and was used to describe and point out the stars composing the tail of the Lesser Bear, the last of which is the pole star, by which the Phoenician sailors were wont to steer." Though Milton was not the first to use *cynosure* metaphorically, the figure as it appears in "L'Allegro" was striking and highly poetic; today it has become so hackneyed through constant imitation that it is practically banned even from commonplace prose.

figurative expressions is indeed a kind of earmark of poetic language provided that the figures are alive rather than fossilized. The use of live figures has much to do with the power to exalt, which is characteristic of great poetry; and of the numerous figures of rhetoric, metaphor, which does not actually state a comparison but simply suggests one, seems to contribute most towards creating in us the sense of mystical exaltation.

Rhetorical figures tend to convey ideas through suggestion, and their prominence in poetic style fits in with the general tendency of poetic language to suggest thoughts rather than to reveal its full message directly.<sup>3</sup> It was this characteristic which impressed Macaulay when he said with reference to Milton's poetry:

Its effect is produced, not so much by what it expresses, as by what it suggests; not so much by the ideas which it directly conveys, as by other ideas which are connected with them.

Although the power to appeal through suggestion comes in part from the use of figures of rhetoric, it is derived chiefly from the appropriate selection of strongly connotative words. For that reason it is important that we understand clearly the difference between connotation and denotation. A word's denotation is what it actually signifies; its connotation is what it implies or suggests in addition to its actual meaning. For example, a dictionary definition of the word *poppy* reads as follows:

<sup>3</sup> The symbolists often carry this use of suggestion to an extreme. Then suggestion becomes arbitrary. It becomes a mere mechanical thing—a substitution of one word for another. Illustrations of this may be found in the works of some of the followers of Mr. T. S. Eliot.

Any of various species of bristly-hairy herbs with showy flowers, mostly red, yellow, or white.

The meaning given by the dictionary is what the word denotes. But with the poppy the thought of sleep has long been associated, for opium, which induces sleep, is made from the poppy. The word *poppy* thus connotes sleep. It also connotes death and peace—things associated with sleep.

In order to appreciate and enjoy poetic language fully we must pay particular attention to connoted ideas.

The Im-  
portance of  
Connotations. The importance of connotations is beautifully illustrated in Colonel McCrae's fine lyric "In Flanders Fields":

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die,  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems* by Lieut.-Colonel John McCrae, M.D. New York and London (G. P. Putnam's Sons), 1919, p. 3.



The effectiveness of Colonel McCrae's allusion to the poppies comes not so much from the fact that they actually did grow in the battlefields of Flanders as from the appropriateness of the thoughts which poppies suggest.

Through the use of figurative language, through the choice of words which have fitting connotations, and, besides, in other ways less obvious, poetic style exerts a stronger influence upon the imagination than ordinary style. And this great strength of imaginative appeal is responsible for what may be called an additional characteristic; namely, the ability to effect illusion, or to evoke the sensation of reality. "Poetry," says Macaulay, "produces an illusion on the eye of the mind." And inasmuch as prose of marked poetic quality can accomplish the same thing, we can apply Macaulay's statement to poetic language in general.

Physical illusion may be illustrated by the fable of the Greek painter Zeuxis and the grapes. According to tradition, Zeuxis painted some grapes so realistically that the birds came and pecked at them. Although the story is unquestionably either sheer fiction or a gross exaggeration, it does call attention to the known fact that a painter, working on a canvas of two dimensions, length and width, can give to the objects in his picture the appearance of solidity, making them seem to have three dimensions—length, width, and thickness.

Words as they are used in poetic style can, by their mere power to denote, produce a somewhat similar illusion on the eye of the mind. In Matthew Arnold's

poem "The Tomb" <sup>5</sup> the description of the sunset shining upon the church of Brou evokes a vivid sensation of physical light:

On the carved western front a flood of light  
Streams from the setting sun.

In cases like this, however, we must not overstress the similarity to physical illusion. Here we recognize illusion comparable in a way to that caused by the picture attributed to Zeuxis; yet though the description of the sunset is extremely realistic, we are not actually deceived as the birds are said to have been when they saw the painted grapes.

For reasons which we shall note later, Matthew Arnold's description is signally artistic, but it would not represent true art at all if it produced illusion exactly similar to that effected by the grapes of Zeuxis. Since the illusion which deceives us, making us think we see objects not really present, is simply copying, it is not true art. "The mere imitation of what is in nature," to borrow the words of Edgar Allan Poe, "entitles no man to the sacred name of 'artist.'" If copying were art, then a good photograph would be more artistic than the Sistine Madonna of Raphael. The madonnas of the Italian masters are, of course, not likenesses of the Virgin Mary, nor are they exact copies of the women who sat as models. The painters used their models only as a means to an end, idealizing the faces in such a way that the pictures which resulted suggest qualities associated with the mother of Christ.

Mere Copy-  
ing and  
True Art.

<sup>5</sup> From *The Church of Brou*.

Sir Philip Sidney illustrates this method and also distinguishes between the mere craftsman and the true artist when he says in his *Defence of Poesie* that painters of the "meaner sort" are accustomed to "counterfeit only such faces as are before them," but that the true artist prefers to "bestow upon you that which is fittest for the eye to see—as the constant though lamenting look of Lucretia, when she punished in herself another's fault, wherein he painteth not Lucretia whom he never saw, but painteth the outward appearance of such a virtue." And the distinction applies in the case of pictures which are not thus symbolic. To be sure, the artist does receive inspiration from nature and represents natural objects truthfully enough to give the beholder of his work the pleasure of recognition, but his primary purpose is to effect illusion of a higher kind than that which results from mere copying. Though Rosa Bonheur's pictures of horses afford us the pleasure of recognition, they do not deceive us. We should never mistake them for real horses, or even for photographs of horses. But it is to be doubted whether any real horses could produce so vivid an illusion of rhythm, grace, and strength; for the power which horses have in themselves, as natural objects, to suggest such qualities has here been intensified by the skill of the artist. In other words, Rosa Bonheur's horses are not replicas of what is found in nature; they are a mysterious combination of nature with something from the artist herself. That indefinable something which art adds to nature was what Wordsworth had in mind when he spoke of "the light that never was, on sea or land." After looking at a picture by Sir

Higher  
Illusion.

George Beaumont which showed Peele Castle in a storm, Wordsworth composed a noteworthy poem. He had once viewed the same scene in the calm of fair weather, and in his poem he tells us what kind of picture he would have painted at that time had the skill of the painter been his. Wordsworth's painting would not only have represented Peele Castle as it appeared in fair weather, but would also have effected the illusion of a peace far more profound than the scene in nature could have suggested:

Ah! then, if mine had been the Painter's hand,  
To express what then I saw; and add the gleam,  
The light that never was, on sea or land,  
The consecration, and the poet's dream;

I would have painted thee, thou hoary Pile,  
Amid a world how different from this!  
Beside a sea that could not cease to smile;  
On tranquil land, beneath a sky of bliss.

Thou shouldst have seemed a treasure-house divine  
Of peaceful years; a chronicle of heaven;—  
Of all the sunbeams that did ever shine  
The very sweetest had to thee been given.

A Picture had it been of lasting ease,  
Elysian quiet, without toil or strife;  
No motion but the moving tide, a breeze,  
Or merely silent Nature's breathing life.

We have seen that words, by their ability to denote, can evoke a sensation of reality comparable in some measure to physical illusion, but words when used in poetic style can do more. The denotative power of certain words in the opening stanza of Blake's poem "The

"Tiger" awakens in us a keen sensation of physical light, but the arousing of this sensation has poetic importance only in that it contributes to the emotional effect of the stanza. The same words, however, have power to connote, and in this particular context they have been so arranged as to suggest terror. Thus the light of which we become conscious is a dread light. By making vivid our sensation of physical light the poet arouses a more vivid emotion of dread. Sir Philip Sidney might indeed have illustrated his point with this stanza as effectively as with his reference to the painting of Lucretia; for here Blake has exemplified not only the use of the higher illusion, but also what Sir Philip rightly considered true art:

Tiger! Tiger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

And now if we return to the bit of description by Matthew Arnold with which we began our study of illusion, and if we quote it this time in its context, we shall find a parallel to what we have just observed in the case of Blake's stanza. Here likewise certain words by their mere power of denotation awaken a consciousness of physical light, making the description extremely realistic without actually causing deception; and here again the sensation thus evoked is subordinate, simply intensifying what is suggested by the connotations. Again we see true art effecting illusion of a kind higher than that which is physical. A "light that never was, on sea or land" comes flooding with the sunset into the church of Brou:

So sleep, forever sleep, O marble Pair!  
 Or, if ye wake, let it be then, when fair  
 On the carved western front a flood of light  
 Streams from the setting sun, and colors bright  
 Prophets, transfigured Saints, and Martyrs brave,  
 In the vast western window of the nave;  
 And on the pavement round the Tomb there glints  
 A chequer-work of glowing sapphire-tints,  
 And amethyst, and ruby—then uncloset  
 Your eyelids on the stone where ye repose,  
 And from your broider'd pillows lift your heads,  
 And rise upon your cold white marble beds;  
 And, looking down on the warm rosy tints  
 Which chequer, at your feet, the illumined flints,  
 Say: *What is this? we are in bliss—forgiven—*  
*Behold the pavement of the courts of Heaven!*

In the lower C on the flute the higher C is latent as an harmonic. If we blow harder, the higher C is produced. Similarly, as connotation grows very strong, there comes the evoking of a new sense of reality. A New Sense of Reality. Wordsworth wished his picture of Peele Castle to make us conscious of a peace different, to be sure, from that known to our actual experience, yet different only in degree. But the illusion with which we are now concerned can evoke the sensation that things completely outside our experience are real. The magic world of fancy becomes real through illusion, or, to use Shakespeare's words—

As imagination bodies forth  
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
 A local habitation and a name.

That which in fact is but a compound of airy nothings  
now assumes the semblance of reality, as when Keats  
speaks of

magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in fair lands forlorn.

Past and present can now become merged to produce the  
illusion of a universality which transcends time, arous-  
ing in us a sensation of the immanently real. Such is the  
case when Wordsworth's Highland Lass sings of

Old unhappy far-off things  
And battles long ago;

and the intimate world of our own thought and fancy  
can be made to seem tangible—as tangible as the actual  
world known to us through sense perception. We be-  
come conscious of this new sort of reality when we  
read the two stanzas in Andrew Marvell's poem "The  
Garden" which compare the pleasures derivable from  
physical nature with those to be found in the realm of  
pure ideas:

What wond'rous Life is this I lead!  
Ripe Apples drop about my head;  
The Luscious Clusters of the Vine  
Upon my Mouth do crush their Wine;  
The Nectarine and curious Peach,  
Into my hands themselves do reach;  
Stumbling on Melons, as I pass,  
Insar'd with flowers, I fall on Grass.

Meanwhile the Mind, from pleasures less,  
Withdraws into its happiness:  
The Mind, that Ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find;—

Yet it creates, transcending these,  
 Far other Worlds, and other Seas,  
 Annihilating all that's made  
 To a green Thought in a green Shade.

In the last two lines of Marvell's second stanza the feeling of this new kind of reality is so strongly evoked that illusion of a still different type is produced. The physical world becomes a mere symbol, a door to a more intimate world of our own. And in cases where such evocation reaches its fullest strength, the world of real things may itself become a mere illusion. Here we are moving in the opposite direction from naturalism. Here, that reality which the naturalists seek to portray is made to appear unreal.

And sometimes the force of illusion—that is, of this poetic type—carries everything before it, leaving only a sort of vacuity. Thus even our sense of the divine is lost. The Roman poet Lucretius, for example, found in that swirling chaos of atoms to which he reduced the physical universe no place for the divine—

Lucretius nobler than his mood,  
 Who dropped his plummet down the broad,  
 Deep universe, and said, "No God,"

Finding no bottom: he denied  
 Divinely the divine, and died  
 Chief poet on the Tiber-side.<sup>6</sup>

When everything thus becomes mere illusion, and the soul flees from the vacuity which alone remains, it has

<sup>6</sup> From Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "A Vision of Poets."



no recourse except to seek repose in oblivion—the panacea which Lucretius recommended:

Go, fool, as doth a well-filled guest  
Sated of life: with tranquil breast  
Take thine inheritance of rest.

Why seekest joys that soon must pale  
Their feeble fires, and swell the tale  
Of things of naught and no avail?

Die, sleep! For all things are the same;  
Tho' spring now stir thy crescent frame,  
'T will wither: all things are the same.<sup>7</sup>

But normally this dissolving of the physical in illusion does not leave vacuity, nor does it beget the longing for oblivion. As the physical recedes, a something else—the spiritual, let us call it, or the divine—seems to reveal itself to the great poets, not through the eye of the body, to be sure, and perhaps not through the eye of the mind, but through what we may vaguely designate as the eye of the soul. In any case, there are passages in the greatest poets which can for a moment evoke the sensation that an unseen other world is real—so real that beside it all else becomes illusion. In Homer's unforgettable bivouac scene in the *Iliad*, the lines which liken the blazing camp fires to the stars—lines which we have quoted before in a different connection—have this inexplicable power. And the effect produced by the original is produced in turn by Tennyson's translation:

<sup>7</sup> Translated by R. Y. Tyrrell. See Tyrrell's *Latin Poetry*. Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1895, p. 73.

As when in Heaven the stars about the moon  
 Look beautiful, and all the winds are laid  
 And every height comes out, and jutting peak  
 And valley, and the immeasurable heavens  
 Break open to their highest, and all the stars  
 Shine and the shepherd gladdens in his heart;  
 So many a fire between the ships and stream  
 Of Xanthus blazed before the towers of Troy.

The last two lines bring about a sensation of reality similar to that caused by physical illusion; we almost see the fires and the turmoil of living men who move about them. But as the force of metaphor begins to work upon us, we begin to visualize the comparison between the camp fires and the stars. Then the power of poetic diction to suggest creates the higher illusion. The camp-fires become symbols of life; the stars symbols of eternity. In sharp contrast to the life and action of the earthly scene stands the peace of the silent skies. Our attention shifts from the transient to the eternal. The fires, the peaks, the valleys—all the scene on earth melts away. The sensation of peace grows stronger; the stars themselves seem to fade into illusion; and we feel ourselves awakening into consciousness of the divine.

*At the bottom of the whole question of poetry are two things—poetic language and rhythm. The union of poetic language with rhythm creates poetry. When language capable of producing the higher illusion is joined with rhythm, the result is great poetry. Higher illusion is brought about in part by the use of rhetorical figures and of connotation; but in its production rhythm often seems to have an important share. Though unrhythmical prose may sometimes*

Conclusion.

*have the power to effect the higher illusion, we most frequently find this power in poetry.*

## QUESTIONS

1. What was Wordsworth's contention about the language of poetry? 2. Against what was Wordsworth rebelling? 3. To what extent do you agree with him? 4. In what respect is there an unmistakable difference between the language of prose and that of poetry? 5. How far is it true that a free use of rhetorical figures distinguishes poetic style? 6. How do rhetorical figures tend to convey ideas? 7. What is the difference between connotation and denotation? 8. Can you illustrate the importance of connotations in poetic style? 9. What is meant by "physical illusion"? 10. Can words produce an effect similar to that of physical illusion? 11. Do you think that mere copying is true art? 12. Can you illustrate the production of "higher illusion" in poetic style? 13. What did Wordsworth mean by "the light that never was, on sea or land"? 14. Why could Sir Philip Sidney have used Blake's poem "The Tiger" as an illustration instead of referring to a picture of Lucretia? 15. What may happen when connotation grows very strong? 16. What opposite kind of illusion can poetry produce? 17. Can illusion of this kind give us a sense of vacuity? 18. What happens to some poets when they are overcome by illusion of this last kind? 19. What, on the other hand, is, under similar circumstances, revealed to the greatest poets? 20. What two things lie at the bottom of the whole question of poetry?

## EXERCISES

1. The following extract contains some of Shelley's ideas about the nature of poetry:

A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. There is this difference between a story and a poem, that a story is a catalogue of detached facts, which have no other connection than time, place, circumstance, cause and effect; the other is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds. The one is partial, and applies only to a definite period of time, and a certain combination of events which can never again recur; the other is universal, and contains within itself the germ of a relation to whatever motives or actions have place in the possible varieties of human nature. Time, which destroys the beauty and the use of the story of particular facts, stripped of the poetry which should invest them, augments that of poetry, and for ever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains. Hence epitomes have been called the moths of just history; they eat out the poetry of it. A story of particular facts is as a mirror which obscures and distorts that which should be beautiful; poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.<sup>8</sup>

Read and reread this carefully. Then try to state in your own words what Shelley means.

2. Consider thoughtfully this statement of Aristotle's:

It is, moreover, evident from what has been said, that it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen,—what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity. The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose. The work of Herodotus might be put into verse, and it would still be a species of history, with metre no less than without it. The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is more philosophical and a higher thing than history; for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular. By the universal I mean how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act according

<sup>8</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. A. S. Cook. Boston (Ginn and Company), p. 10.

to the law of probability or necessity; and it is this universality at which poetry aims in the names she attaches to the personages.<sup>9</sup>

What does Aristotle mean when he says that poetry is "a more philosophical and a higher thing than history"? Is there anything in common between the thought in this passage and that in the passage from Shelley? If so, what?

3. William Cullen Bryant's lecture "On the Nature of Poetry" ends with the following paragraph:

In conclusion, I will observe that the elements of poetry make a part of our natures, and that every individual is more or less a poet. In this "bank-note world," as it has been happily denominated, we sometimes meet with individuals who declare that they have no taste for poetry. But by their leave I will assert that they are mistaken; they have it, although they may have never cultivated it. Is there any one among them who will confess himself insensible to the beauty of order or to the pleasure of variety—two principles, the happy mingling of which makes the perfection of poetic numbers? Is there any one whose eye is undelighted with beautiful forms and colors, whose ear is not charmed by sweet sounds, and who sees no loveliness in the returns of light and darkness, and the changes of the seasons? Is there any one for whom the works of Nature have no associations but such as relate to his animal wants? Is there any one to whom her great courses and operations show no majesty, to whom they impart no knowledge, and from whom they hide no secrets? Is there any one who is attached by no ties to his fellow-beings, who has no hopes for the future, and no memory of the past? Have they all forgotten the days and the friends of their childhood, and do they all shut their eyes to the advances of age? Have they nothing to desire and nothing to lament, and are their minds never darkened with the shadows of fear? Is it, in short, for these men that life has no pleasures and no pains, the grave no solemnity and the world to come no mysteries? All these things are the sources of poetry, and they are not only part of our-

<sup>9</sup> From S. H. Butcher, *The Poetics of Aristotle*. London, 1911, p. 35. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

selves, but of the universe, and will expire only with the last of the creatures of God.<sup>10</sup>

Do you agree with Bryant that "every individual is more or less a poet"? In what way does poetry exemplify the mingling of "order" and "variety"? What are some of the things which Bryant lists as the "sources of poetry"? Can you remember a poem which reflects delight in "beautiful forms and colors"?

Go through Bryant's list of sources, and in the case of each source suggested try to name a poem derived chiefly from that source.

4. "Poetry," says Shelley, "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar."

Comment on this statement in the light of what you have learned about poetry.

5. In "The Study of Poetry" Matthew Arnold makes the following observations:

The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea *is* the fact. The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry.

In your own words try to restate the thoughts which Matthew Arnold has here expressed.

<sup>10</sup> *Prose Writings of William Cullen Bryant*. New York (D. Appleton-Century Company), 1884, I, 13.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE TECHNIQUE OF POETRY

**SINCE** poetry is written in verse and at the same time in language which appeals directly and forcefully to the imagination, the study of poetry must include the study of both verse and poetic style. We have already investigated the structure of verse in a general way, and we have already noted the chief characteristics of poetic language. It remains for us to study some of the details of versification and some of the poet's stylistic devices to which we have not yet given attention. Such things constitute poetic technique, and to a brief survey of poetic technique this chapter will be devoted. Let us give our attention first to some of the technical aspects of versification.

As we have already seen, lines of verse are divided into units called *feet*, which correspond roughly to bars in music. In Greek and Latin poetry there were many kinds of feet, each differing from the others in rhythmical pattern. English metrical feet are named after the classical feet and are similar to them in form, but the number of different kinds ordinarily used is much smaller. The reason for this is not far to seek. In English verse the rhythmical stress almost always coincides with the word accent; and since we tend to lengthen an accented syllable, combinations represented in Latin and Greek by two longs or by two shorts cannot be freely imitated in our poetry.

**Metrical  
Feet.**

The classical spondee, for example, a foot composed of two long syllables, is likely to break down under the strong English accent. For a foot to be a spondee its two syllables must have equal duration, both being long; but when the English accent falls on the first and there is no accent on the second, the first syllable is lengthened in pronunciation and the spondee is resolved into an English trochee. If the accent falls on the second of the two syllables in the spondee, then that syllable is prolonged and the foot breaks down into an English iambus. Under certain circumstances a foot composed of two separate words may escape the effect of the accent, or, to be more exact, both words may be accented and thus the equality of duration may be preserved.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, however, the English word accent plays havoc with attempts to reproduce the classical spondee in English verse. And the same thing is true of the classical pyrrhic and of the more complicated Greek and Latin feet. As a result, only four different feet are really important in English—the *iambus*, the *trochee*, the *anapaest*, and the *dactyl*. In studying each of these feet we shall note the classical form as well as the English, in order that the nature of the English foot may be made more clear by comparison.

In the ancient classical poetry the iambus was a foot of two syllables, a short followed by a long. The Eng-

<sup>1</sup> This method of forming a spondee in English is illustrated in a line quoted by Matthew Arnold in his essay "On Translating Homer." It is a line translated from the *Iliad* by Dr. Hawtrey, Provost of Eton:

Clearly the rest I behold of the dark-eyed sons of Achaia.

Here *dark-eyed* is a spondee, if we allow two accents in the foot and mark it thus: | dárk-eyéd |.



lish iambus likewise contains two syllables, the first unaccented, the second accented. The syllables of the word *pre-vail* form an iambus. Though the relative quantity of syllables in English is not so marked as in Latin and Greek, the accent in English tends to lengthen the second syllable, so that the English iambus and the classical are comparable in time pattern. When the iambus is the dominant foot in a line of verse, the line is said to be *iambic*. The following stanza from Poe's "To One in Paradise" illustrates iambic verse:

Iambic  
Verse.

<sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /  
 And all | my days | are tran- | ces,  
<sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /  
 And all | my night- | ly dreams  
<sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /  
 Are where | thy gray | eye glan- | ces  
<sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> /  
 And where | thy foot- | step gleams . . .

If we reverse the position of the syllables in the classical iambus so as to make the long syllable come first and the short follow, we have the classical trochee. In

English a shifting of the accent from the second syllable of the iambus to the first converts an iambic foot into a trochee. A trochee, then, is a foot composed of an accented syllable followed by an unaccented. Since the first syllable is accented, it receives slightly more prolongation; and the time pattern of the English trochee, though not exactly the same as that of the classical, is similar to it, as was the case with the time pattern of the iambus. The syllables of the word *for'est* form a trochee. Verse in which the trochee is the dominant foot is called trochaic.

Trochaic  
Verse.

The well-known song in the first canto of Scott's *Lady of the Lake* is written in trochaic verse. The first four lines will give sufficient illustration:

Sol-dier, | rest! thy | war-fare | o'er,  
 Sleep the | sleep that | knows not | break-ing;  
 Dream of | bat-tled | fields no | more,  
 Days of | dan-ger, | nights of | wak-ing.

If we add another short syllable to the classical iambus, thus constructing a foot in which there are two short syllables followed by one long, we have the classical anapaest. Similarly, if we place an additional unaccented syllable before the accent in the English iambus, we form the English anapaest. We may then define the anapaest as a foot composed of two unaccented syllables followed by one accented syllable. Since the last syllable has slightly more duration than either of the other two because of the accent, the time pattern of the English anapaest is again comparable to that of the classical. The syllables of the word *in-com-mode'* form an anapaest. Verse in which the anapaest dominates is termed anapaestic. Clement Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas," from which the following lines are taken, exemplifies anapaestic verse:

'Twas the night | be-fore Christ- | mas, when all | through the  
                   house  
 Not a crea- | ture was stir- | ring, not ev- | en a mouse;

<sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /  
 The stock- | ings were hung | by the chim- | ney with care,  
<sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /  
 In hopes | that St. Nich- | o-las soon | would be there.

If, now, we place the long syllable of the classical anapaest in front of the two shorts, we have the classical dactyl. And if we place the accented syllable of the English anapaest in front of the two unaccented syllables, we form the English dactyl. The time pattern of the dactyl in English is again comparable to that of the similar foot in Latin and Greek, because the accent over the first syllable gives that syllable slightly more duration than either of the other two in the foot. The syllables of the word *fes'ti-val* form a dactyl. Verse in which the dominant foot is the dactyl is called dactylic. The first four lines of the boat song in the second canto of *The Lady of the Lake* furnish an example of dactylic verse:

/   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   /   <sup>x</sup> /  
 Hail to the | chief who in | tri-umph ad- | van-ces!  
 /   <sup>x</sup>   <sup>x</sup> /   /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   /   <sup>x</sup>   <sup>x</sup> /  
 Hon-ored and | blessed be the | ev-er green | pine!  
 /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   /   <sup>x</sup> /  
 Long may the | tree in his | ban-ner that | glan-ces,  
 /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   /  
 Flour-ish and | shel-ter the | grace of our | line!

When a line can be broken up into a number of regular feet or measures, we say that it is written in meter. We are then using the word *meter* in a general sense.

**Meter.** We can also use the word in a particular sense and say that the line is written in a certain definite meter. In that case we designate the particular kind of meter by telling what kind of foot is dominant in the line and how many feet the line con-

tains. To indicate the number of feet, we use technical terms which are formed by prefixing Greek numerals to the word *meter*. Thus *monometer* describes a line of one foot; *dimeter*, a line of two; *trimeter*, a line of three; *tetrameter*, a line of four; *pentameter*, a line of five; *hexameter*, a line of six; *heptameter*, a line of seven; and *octameter*, a line of eight. When we qualify one of these terms by an adjective which indicates a particular kind of foot, we immediately name a particular meter. For example, the expression *iambic pentameter* designates a line which contains five feet and in which the iambus is the dominant foot; the expression *dactylic tetrameter* designates a line which contains four feet and in which the dactyl is dominant; the expression *trochaic trimeter* designates a line which contains three feet and in which the trochee is dominant.<sup>2</sup>

When we divide a line into the feet of which it is composed, mark the accented and the unaccented syllables, and name the particular meter exemplified, we are said to *scan* the line. The lines in the following excerpts have been marked off to illustrate scansion. At the same time they illustrate a few different meters:

*Iambic Tetrameter*

$\begin{array}{ccccccc} \times & / & \times & / & \times & / & \times & / \\ \text{If these} & | & \text{de-lights} & | & \text{thy mind} & | & \text{may move}, \\ \times & / & \times & / & \times & / & \times & / \\ \text{Then live} & | & \text{with me} & | & \text{and be} & | & \text{my love}. \end{array}$

MARLOWE, "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love."

<sup>2</sup>In certain Greek meters a measure was not the same as a foot. It was a dipody; that is, it was composed of two feet. Accordingly, the Greek iambic dimeter, for instance, would contain four feet and according to our system of marking would be iambic tetrameter. Because of possible confusion arising out

*Anapaestic Tetrameter*

<sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /  
 The As-syr- | ian came down | like a wolf | on the fold,  
<sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /  
 And his co- | horts were gleam- | ing in pur- | ple and gold.

BYRON, "The Destruction of Sennacherib."

*Trochaic Tetrameter*

/ <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup>  
 Stay and | read this | rude in- | scrip-tion,  
 / <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup>  
 Read this | song of | Hi-a- | wa-tha.

LONGFELLOW, *Hiawatha*.

*Dactylic Hexameter*

/ <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup>   /  
 This is the | for-est prim- | e-val. The | mur-mur-ing | pines  
<sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup> /   <sup>x</sup>  
 and the | hem-locks,  
 / <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup>  
 Beard-ed with | moss, and in | gar-ments | green, in-dis- |  
 / <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup>   / <sup>x</sup> <sup>x</sup>  
 tinct in the | twi-light. . . .

LONGFELLOW, *Evangeline*.

If we now turn back and re-examine the lines from Poe which were used to illustrate iambic rhythm and those from Scott which were used to illustrate trochaic, we shall notice that certain lines have an extra syllable at the end. Such presence of an extra syllable is of frequent occurrence, and we must be on our guard lest it lead us astray in scanning. In iambic and anapaestic rhythms an extra syllable at the end cannot be counted as an additional foot, because it does not carry an accent. It is simply a kind of left-over syllable which gives an

**Hypercatalectic and Catalectic Lines.**

of such cases, some people prefer to identify English lines simply by the number of accents or stresses. They would call iambic tetrameter four-stress iambic.

effect of elasticity. An iambic or anapaestic line containing one of these extra syllables is called *hypercatalectic*.<sup>3</sup> The first line of the stanza quoted from Poe's "To One in Paradise" is an *iambic trimeter hypercatalectic*:

× /   × /   × /   ×  
And all | my days | are tran- | ces.

On the other hand, we often find at the end of trochaic or of dactylic lines what looks like an extra syllable. As a matter of fact, however, this is not an extra syllable at all. It carries an accent and in scansion must be counted as a foot, for it is the beginning of a foot in which at least one other syllable is lacking. A line in which the final foot is thus incomplete is called *catalectic*. The first line of the stanza from Scott quoted as an illustration of trochaic rhythm is not trochaic trimeter hypercatalectic, but is trochaic tetrameter *catalectic*—

/ ×   / ×   / ×   /  
Sol-dier | rest! thy | war-fare | o'er.

When all the feet in a passage of poetry are of the same kind, the music of the lines tends to be monotonous. We see this exemplified in the following lines from Samuel Johnson's "The Vanity of Human Wishes." Here we have an unvaried sequence of iambuses:

Let observation, with extensive view  
Survey mankind from China to Peru;

<sup>3</sup> The word *hypercatalectic* is compounded of *hyper*, which comes from a Greek word meaning *over*, and *catalectic* which comes from a Greek word meaning *incomplete*. In a hypercatalectic line the extra syllable may be considered part of an unfinished foot; but since it is not an accented syllable, this unfinished foot cannot count in scansion, and we have to think of the extra syllable as *left over*. Thus both the idea *over* and the idea *incomplete* have application.

Remark each anxious toil, each eager strife,  
And watch the busy scenes of crowded life;  
Then say how hope and fear, desire and hate,  
O'erspread with snares the crowded maze of fate.

Such monotony can be prevented by the substitution, here and there, of feet different in pattern from the dominant foot. The next four lines of the same poem show how Dr. Johnson deliberately avoided three substitutions which many other poets would have employed:

Where wav'ring man, betrayed by vent'rous pride,  
To tread the dreary paths without a guide;  
As treach'rous phantoms in the mist delude,  
Shuns fancied ills, or chases airy good.

In order to keep his iambuses Dr. Johnson resorted to the device known as *apocope*, the dropping out of a vowel in the middle of a word. Thus he reduces *wavering* to *wav'ring*, *treacherous* to *treach'rous*, *venturous* to *vent'rous*. Had he not done so, his line would have shown three substitutions, an anapaest for an iambus in each case. And what would the effect have been? If we read the lines aloud as they stand and then read them with the substitutions, we shall feel that the monotony has at least been lessened and that the three adjectives have received an effective rhetorical emphasis. Any change from strict regularity tends to attract our attention; and for that reason substitutions are serviceable not only in relieving monotony, but also in producing rhetorical effects.

Just as anapaests may be substituted for iambuses, so iambuses may be substituted for anapaests, because they

both represent what is known as *ascending rhythm*. In the case of both, we *go up*, so to speak, from the lesser effort exerted in uttering an unaccented syllable, or unaccented syllables, to the greater effort required to utter a syllable which is stressed. And in like manner trochees and dactyls may be substituted for one another, since they both represent *descending rhythm*, in which we *go down*, as it were, from the greater effort of uttering accented syllables to the lesser of uttering those not accented. These are the substitutions most frequently met with. Others occur, however, and one of them is sufficiently important to deserve mention here. A trochee often takes the place of an iambus, especially in the first foot of the line. By substituting a trochee in the first foot Milton produces exactly the right emphasis when he says—

/        ×        × /        × /        × /        × /  
Hence with | de-ni- | al vain | and coy | ex-cuse.

In the case of lines which carry five stresses or more, substitutions do not often cause us any difficulty in determining the meter, because feet of some one kind are usually in the majority and therefore dominant. In shorter lines, however, substitutions often make it practically impossible to know just what is the meter. Here, for example, is the second stanza of Stevenson's "Requiem" scanned in a strictly legitimate way:

/        ×        × /        × /        × /        × /  
This be | the verse | you grave | for me:  
/        × /        × /        × /        × /  
Here | he lies | where he longed | to be;  
/        ×        × /        × /        × /        × /  
Home is | the sail- | or, home | from sea,  
×        × /        × /        ×        × /  
And the bun- | ter home | from the bill.



When the lines are scanned in this way, the meter of the first three is iambic tetrameter. In the fourth line we have two anapaests and only one iambus; but inasmuch as the other lines are iambic, we can make this one conform by calling it an iambic trimeter with two anapaestic substitutions. The rhythm of the stanza as a whole is clearly iambic; but we have a trochee substituted in the first foot of the first line and in the first foot of the third.<sup>4</sup> If these two feet were definitely iambic, the other feet in the stanza remaining as they are, we could call the rhythm of the stanza iambic without question; but the substitution of the two makes a different kind of scansion possible, giving us this:

/    ×    ×    /    ×    /    ×    /  
 This be the | verse you | grave for | me:  
 /    ×    /    ×    ×    /    ×    /  
 Here be | lies where be | longed to | be;  
 /    ×    ×    /    ×    /    ×    /  
 Home is the | sail-or, | home from | sea,  
       ×    ×    /    ×    /    ×    ×    /  
 And the | bunt-er | home from the | bill.

Now the meter of the first three lines may be called trochaic tetrameter catalectic; that of the fourth, trochaic trimeter catalectic with *anacrusis*.<sup>5</sup> This shows how easy it is to slip from a consciousness of iambic rhythm to a consciousness of trochaic. Many lines in Milton's "L'Allegro" can be scanned either as truncated

<sup>4</sup> The second line is here scanned as a *truncated* line. An iambic line is said to be truncated when the unaccented syllable of the first iambus is missing. The absence of the syllable is comparable to a rest in music.

<sup>5</sup> In trochaic and dactylic rhythms, the occurrence of one short syllable, or of two, before the first stress in a line is termed *anacrusis* (a beating back). Here the two short syllables at the beginning of the line are related rhythmically to the preceding line. They reach back, so to speak, and form a dactyl with the last syllable in the catalectic line which precedes. If there had been only one short syllable, a trochee would have been formed instead.

iambic tetrameters or as trochaic tetrameters. All through the rhythm of the poem, there is an almost constant interplay of iambic and trochaic effects; yet we pass from one to another without feeling any unevenness in the transition.

But the use of substitutions is not the only means by which a poet may prevent monotony in the sound of his verse. He may do much towards relieving monotony

by judiciously shifting the position of the *caesura*. The *caesura* is a natural pause within the line—a pause at which the reader may take breath. It is important chiefly in the longer lines such as the pentameters and the hexameters. It must fall at the end of a word, but it may come either at the end or in the middle of a foot.<sup>6</sup> When the *caesura* occurs regularly at the same place in every line, the effect is disagreeably monotonous. The following doleful picture of life, offered by the eighteenth-century poet, Richard West, shows how monotonous verse can be when the position of the *caesura* is not frequently shifted:

The  
Caesura.

Health is at best a vain precarious thing,  
And fair-faced youth is ever on the wing;  
'Tis like the stream beside whose watery bed  
Some blooming plant exalts his flowery head;  
Nursed by the wave the spreading branches rise;  
Shade all the ground and flourish to the skies;  
The waves the while beneath in secret flow,  
And undermine the hollow bank below;

<sup>6</sup> A verse may have no *caesura*, and it may have more than one. If the pause follows a stressed syllable, it is called *masculine caesura*; if it follows an unstressed syllable, it is called *feminine*. The *caesura* should not be confused with the metrical pause which, as we have seen, corresponds to a rest in music.

Wide and more wide the waters urge their way,  
 Bare all the roots and on their fibres prey;  
 Too late the plant bewails his foolish pride,  
 And sinks untimely in the whelming tide.<sup>7</sup>

Here the caesura falls regularly at the end of the second foot until we come to the last line, and the effect is consequently one of intolerable monotony.<sup>8</sup> The same kind of verse, however, can be made pleasing by a skillful use of the caesura such as Pope shows in these lines from *The Rape of the Lock*:

See, fierce Belinda on the baron flies,  
 With more than usual lightning in her eyes;  
 Nor feared the chief th' unequal fight to try,  
 Who sought no more than on his foe to die.  
 But this bold lord, with manly strength endued,  
 She with one finger and a thumb subdued:  
 Just where the breath of life his nostrils drew,  
 A charge of snuff the wily virgin threw;  
 Sudden, with startling tears each eye o'erflows,  
 And the high dome re-echoes to his nose.

The sound of Pope's lines is pleasing; yet some monotony remains. Pope has varied the position of his caesural pause, but he has permitted a non-caesural pause to occur at the end of every line. This to some readers is disagreeable, for it tends to produce a singsong effect. Lines like these that end with a pause marked by punctuation are termed *end-stopped*. When there is no punctuation and the meaning is "drawn out," to use Milton's

<sup>7</sup> From West's *Ad Amicos*.

<sup>8</sup> Pope has been accused of the same fault, but the charge is unfair. See the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, IX, 82.

phrase, from one line into the next, so that the voice of the reader merely hesitates instead of pausing noticeably, the lines are called *run-on* lines. The presence of too many run-on lines following each other in continuous succession is likely to make us lose all feeling for the line unit and causes a passage to read like rhythmic prose rather than verse. This we have already seen illustrated in an excerpt from Keats's "Endymion."<sup>9</sup> However, a moderate intersprinkling of run-on lines lends variety and beauty to a poem's rhythmical effect. The following passage from *Paradise Lost* exemplifies the artistic use of run-on lines:

Standing on Earth, not rapt above the pole,  
More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged  
To hoarse or mute, though fallen on evil days,  
On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,  
In darkness and with dangers compassed round,  
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou  
Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when Morn  
Purples the East. Still govern thou my song,  
Urania,<sup>10</sup> and fit audience find, though few.<sup>11</sup>

Many people when they think of poetry immediately think of rhyme, but rhyme is not essential to poetry. Much of our very greatest poetry is written in *blank verse*; that is, in lines which do not rhyme. Rhyme, nevertheless, does have importance. Blank verse is confined chiefly to the drama and to long narrative poems; in lyric poetry rhymed verse is the rule. When two

<sup>9</sup> See page 106.

<sup>10</sup> In Greek mythology Urania was the Muse of astronomy; here she is the spirit of poetry.

<sup>11</sup> The second, sixth, and seventh lines are run-on; the others are end-stopped.

or more words end in the same sound, they are said to rhyme. Thus *play* rhymes with *day*. In both words the vowel is the same, but it is preceded by different consonants. If the consonant sounds

Rhyme. that precede are the same, the rhyme is considered imperfect. *Play* does not form a perfect rhyme with *display*. Words of more than one syllable rhyme, if they are both accented on the last syllable and the last syllable of one rhymes with the last syllable of the other; thus *esteem* rhymes with *beseem*. Words of more than one syllable also rhyme if the accented syllables rhyme and the unaccented syllables which follow the accent in the one correspond in sound to the unaccented syllables which follow the accent in the other. Thus *playing* rhymes with *saying*, and *beautiful* with *dutiful*; but *saying* does not rhyme with *running*, for the accented syllables do not rhyme. Rhymes in which only accented syllables are concerned are *masculine*; those in which unaccented syllables also have a place are called *feminine*.

Ordinarily when we speak of rhyme, we are thinking of the similarity of sound which often occurs at the end of lines in poetry. When the last word of one line rhymes with the last word in another, the two lines are said to rhyme. In strictly technical phraseology rhyme at the end of lines is called *end rhyme*. Both feminine and masculine *end rhymes* are illustrated in the following stanza from Thomas Hood's "The Bridge of Sighs":

Take her up tenderly,  
Lift her with care!  
Fashioned so slenderly,  
Young and so fair.

The rhyming of the last word of a line with a word near the middle of the same line is known as *internal rhyme*. By the use of internal rhyme Poe obtained rich harmonies in his "Raven." He can take a word at the end of a line and rhyme it not only with one in the middle of the same line, but also with a word near the middle of the following line. And he can do that twice in one stanza. Here is the opening stanza, in which *December* rhymes with *remember* and *ember*, while *borrow* rhymes with *morrow* and *sorrow*:

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;  
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the  
floor.

Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow  
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Le-  
nore—

For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Le-  
nore—

Nameless *here* for evermore.

A kind of rhyme also appears at the beginning of words. It is sometimes called initial rhyme, but more frequently *alliteration*. If the initial letter or sound in the accented syllable of a word repeats the initial letter or sound in the accented syllable of a preceding word, we have alliteration. The tendency to alliterate is part of our inheritance from our Anglo-Saxon forefathers. Some of our most common phrases have preserved the trick. We say *vim and vigor*, *might and main*, *rough and ready*, *bag and baggage*; indeed there is no end of such expressions. In Anglo-Saxon, alliteration was an essential characteristic of

poetic form. We can easily recognize it in these two lines from *Beowulf*:

Wiglaf waes haten, Weoxstanes sunu,  
Leoflic lind-wiga, leod Scylfinga.<sup>12</sup>

Since alliteration usually occurs at the beginning of accented syllables, it fixes our attention on the accent and thus strengthens the rhythm. It is no longer a requisite in poetry, but modern poets often make effective use of it. In the following stanza from Lanier's "Song of the Chattahoochee" there is much alliteration, but it is artistically varied and does not thrust itself upon us too violently:

All down the hills of Habersham,  
All through the valleys of Hall,  
The rushes cried *Abide, abide*,  
The willful waterweeds held me thrall,  
The laving laurel turned my tide,  
The ferns and the fondling grass said *Stay*,  
The dewberry dipped for to work delay,  
And the little reeds sighed *Abide, abide*,  
*Here in the hills of Habersham,*  
*Here in the valleys of Hall.*<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes, however, alliteration in modern poetry is carried to excess. It is rather disagreeably conspicuous in the line of Swinburne's:

Love, what ailed thee to leave life that was made lovely,  
we thought, with love?

<sup>12</sup> Wiglaf he was named, Weoxtan's son,  
Beloved shield warrior, lord of the Scylfings.

<sup>13</sup> *Poems of Sidney Lanier*. New York (Charles Scribner's Sons), 1886, p. 24.

A kind of rhyme in which the vowel sounds of accented syllables correspond, but not the consonant sounds is sometimes termed *middle rhyme*; more often, however, it is called *assonance*. In the *Assonance*. words *slide* and *time* we have an illustration of assonance; for the vowel sounds are the same, while the consonants are different. In the old French *Song of Roland* assonance has an importance similar to that of alliteration in *Beowulf*. It is also characteristic of other early poems. In modern English poetry we often find assonance, as in Arnold's "Rugby Chapel," but it has never been a typical element in English verse as alliteration once was. In Juan's song from George Eliot's "The Spanish Gypsy" assonance not only occurs several times within the lines, but also produces an effect which suggests *end rhyme*. This effect as it appears in the last stanza will be made more easily recognizable if we italicize the assonant syllables:

Beauty has no mortal *f*ather,  
           Holy light her form engendered  
 Out of tremor, yearning, *glad*ness,  
       Presage sweet and joy *re*membered—  
       Child of Light, *Fed*alma! <sup>14</sup>

Another effect somewhat similar to rhyme is brought about when the poet repeats a phrase or even a line or two usually at regular intervals. Repetition of this kind is called *refrain*. The pirates' song in Stevenson's *Treasure Island* has a lively refrain:

<sup>14</sup> See Felix Holt, *Jubal*, and *Other Poems*, and *The Spanish Gypsy* by George Eliot. Chicago, New York, and San Francisco (Belford Clark and Company), 1889, p. 315.



Fifteen men on a dead man's chest—  
 Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!  
 Drink and the devil had done for the rest—  
 Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!

When the lines of a poem are combined into groups according to some typical scheme, those groups are called *stanzas*. They may be likened, in a way, to the paragraphs of a prose composition. By varying the number of lines included in a stanza, by varying the length of the different lines, and by varying the order in which the lines rhyme, the poets have evolved many different forms of stanza. A number of these forms have become traditional and have received special names. We should take note of a few of the more important ones.

When lines are grouped in pairs, the pairs are called couplets. Tennyson's "Locksley Hall" is written in two-line stanzas—trochaic octameter couplets. Five of them are interesting to quote, not only because they illustrate this form, but also because the vision which they describe—and in 1842, when the poem was published, it was, of course, only a vision—has in part become reality:

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,      *a*  
 Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that  
     would be;      *a*

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic  
     sails,      *b*  
 Pilots of the purple twilight dropping down with costly  
     bales;      *b*

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a  
     ghastly dew c  
 From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central  
     blue; c  
 Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind,  
     rushing warm, d  
 With the standards of the peoples plunging through the  
     thunder storm: d  
 Till the war-drum throb'd no longer, and the battle  
     flags were furl'd e  
 In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world. e

The most important couplet in English poetry is composed of rhyming iambic pentameter lines. It is known as the *heroic couplet*. This was the favorite verse form of many eighteenth-century poets, notably Pope. These couplets, however, are not usually regarded as stanzas, because we are accustomed to seeing them printed continuously in solid blocks. The passage quoted from Pope to illustrate shifting of the caesura shows Pope's use of the heroic couplet. Likewise in heroic couplets are the following lines from Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*:

How often have I blest the coming day, a  
 When toil remitting lent its turn to play, a  
 And all the village train, from labor free, b  
 Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree, b  
 While many a pastime circled in the shade, c  
 The young contending as the old surveyed; c  
 And many a gambol frolicked o'er the ground, d  
 And sleights of art and feats of strength went round. d

Stanzas of three lines all three of which rhyme to the same sound are called *triplets*. The lines may or may not be of equal length. In these triplets from Edmund Gosse's "Lying in the Grass" each line carries the same number of stresses:

Behind the mowers, on the amber air, *a*  
 A dark-green beech-wood rises, still and fair, *a*  
 A white path winding up it like a stair. *a*

And see that girl, with pitcher on her head, *b*  
 And clean white apron on her gown of red,— *b*  
 Her even-song of love is but half-said: *b*

She waits the youngest mower. Now he goes *c*  
 Her cheeks are redder than a wild blush-rose: *c*  
 They climb up where the deepest shadows close.<sup>15</sup> *c*

Triplets written in the interlacing rhyme scheme *aba, bcb, cdc*, form what is called *terza rima*. The most famous example of this is Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Shelley uses *terza rima* in his "Ode to the West Wind." He divides the poem into sections of four *terza rima* stanzas followed by a concluding couplet thus:

Terza  
Rima.

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is: *a*  
 What if my leaves are falling like its own! *b*  
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies *a*

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone, *b*  
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce, *c*  
 My Spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one! *b*

<sup>15</sup> From Gosse's *On Viol and Flute*. London, 1873. By permission of William Heinemann, and Charles Scribner's Sons.

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe	<i>c</i>
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!	<i>d</i>
And, by the incantation of this verse,	<i>c</i>
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth	<i>d</i>
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!	<i>e</i>
Be through my lips to unawakened earth	<i>d</i>
The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,	<i>f</i>
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?	<i>f</i>

Stanzas of four lines are usually known as quatrains. Often a quatrain is a complete poem in itself. What a wealth of thought may be stowed in a quatrain is evidenced by Father Tabb's "Fame":

The	Their Noonday never knows
Quatrain.	What names immortal are:
	'Tis night alone that shows
	How star surpasseth star. <sup>16</sup>

Of great importance in English poetry is the four-line stanza sometimes called *common meter*, but more frequently referred to as *ballad meter*. It results from the breaking up of long lines of seven accents known as *fourteeners* because they contained fourteen syllables. The first and third lines of the ballad stanza are iambic tetrameters; the second and fourth lines are iambic trimeters. The second and fourth rhyme; the first and third may or may not. This familiar stanza from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is an example of ballad meter:

<sup>16</sup> *The Poetry of Father Tabb*, Collected Edition by Francis E. Litz. New York (Dodd, Mead and Company), 1928, p. 364.

All in a hot and copper sky,	<i>a</i>
The bloody sun at noon	<i>b</i>
Right up above the mast did stand	<i>c</i>
No bigger than the moon.	<i>b</i>

The quatrain familiarly known as *long meter* is composed of iambic tetrameters, rhyming *aabb*. The Doxology is written in long meter:

Long Meter.	Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;	<i>a</i>
	Praise him, all creatures here below;	<i>a</i>
	Praise him above, ye heavenly host;	<i>b</i>
	Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.	<i>b</i>

In addition to the stanzaic forms which we have noted, English poetry offers stanzas of five, six, seven, eight, and nine lines. In each case numerous different rhyme schemes and line lengths may occur and produce different kinds of stanza. Of these we have space to illustrate only three of the more important: Rime Royal, ottava rima, and the Spenserian Stanza.

Rime Royal is a seven-line stanza of iambic pentameter verse, rhyming *ababbcc*. It is sometimes called the Chaucerian Stanza after Chaucer who used it in his *Troilus and Cressida*, and elsewhere. It is said to have been named Rime Royal after James I of Scotland who used it for his *Kingis Quair*, in which he celebrates his love for Lady Jane Beaufort, his future bride. When he was imprisoned in the keep of Windsor Castle, he went one day to his window and, seeing Lady Jane in the garden below, fell in love with her:

Rime  
Royal.

Bewailing in my chamber thus alone,	<i>a</i>
Despairèd of all joy and remedy,	<i>b</i>
For-tired of my thought and wo-begone,	<i>a</i>
And to the window 'gan I walk on high,	<i>b</i>
To see the world and folk that went forby,	<i>b</i>
As for the time though I of mirthes food	<i>c</i>
Might have no more, to look it did me good.	<i>c</i>

The most celebrated of the eight-line forms is *ottava rima*. It is iambic pentameter verse, rhyming *abababcc*. It finds illustration in the following stanza from Byron's *Don Juan*:

Ottava	If, fallen in evil days on evil tongues,	<i>a</i>
Rima.	Milton appeal'd to the Avenger, Time,	<i>b</i>
	If Time, the Avenger, execrates his wrongs	<i>a</i>
	And makes the word "Miltonic" mean	
	"sublime,"	<i>b</i>
	He deign'd not to belie his soul in songs,	<i>a</i>
	Nor turn his very talent to a crime;	<i>b</i>
	He did not loathe the Sire to laud the Son,	<i>c</i>
	But clos'd the tyrant-hater he begun.	<i>c</i>

And finally we have the Spenserian Stanza, a form invented by Spenser and used by him in his *Faerie Queene*. This stanza, in which many subsequent poems have been written, is composed of eight iambic pentameter lines followed by an *alexandrine*, a line of six iambic feet. The rhyme scheme is *ababbcbcc*. The following Spenserian Stanza from the *Faerie Queene* describes the Redcrosse Knight:

But on his brest a bloodie crosse he bore,	<i>a</i>
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,	<i>b</i>

For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore,	<i>a</i>
And dead as living ever him ador'd:	<i>b</i>
Upon his shield the like was also scor'd,	<i>b</i>
For sovraine hope, which in his helpe he had:	<i>c</i>
Right faithfull true he was in deede and word,	<i>b</i>
But if his cheere did seeme too solemn sad;	<i>c</i>
Yet nothing did he dread, but ever was ydrad.	<i>c</i>

The so-called French forms, of which Austin Dobson and others have contributed admirable examples, exhibit fixed rhyme schemes, and for that reason may be noted in connection with our study of stanzas. The most common are the *rondeau*, the *rondelet*, the *triolet*, the *villanelle*, and the *ballade*. They are characterized by lightness, elegance, and grace, and all of them use the refrain. For an explanation of their somewhat complicated structure the student must be referred to a book devoted to versification. However, we have space to quote Dobson's *triolet Urceus Exit*, which illustrates the peculiar finish and charm of these forms:

I intended an Ode,  
 And it turned to a Sonnet.  
 It began *à la mode*,  
 I intended an Ode;  
 But Rose crossed the road  
 In her latest new bonnet;  
 I intended an Ode;  
 And it turned to a Sonnet.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Reprinted by permission of Mr. A. T. A. Dobson, son of the poet, and by permission of the Oxford University Press. This *triolet* is the last in the series entitled *Rose Leaves*, which will be found on page 323 of the *Complete Poetical Works of Austin Dobson*. Oxford University Press, London, 1924.

We have already seen that the poet makes frequent use of connotative words and rhetorical figures. In most cases, he does this, as it should seem, not consciously, in the manner of a technician, but intuitively. Nevertheless, technique does have a place in the writing of poetry, even outside the mere mechanics of versification. Sometimes the poet, with deliberate intent, seeks out the best means of producing the effect he desires. Of this Poe gives us an excellent illustration. In "The Philosophy of Composition" he tells us how he went about finding a refrain which would accentuate the melancholy tone of his "Raven":

. . . Having made up my mind to a refrain, the division of the poem into stanzas was, of course, a corollary, the refrain forming the close to each stanza. That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis admitted no doubt; and these considerations inevitably led me to the long "o" as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with the "r" as the most producible consonant.

The sound of the refrain being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which I had predetermined as the tone of the poem. In such search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word "Nevermore." In fact, it was the very first which presented itself.

But this vowel "o" is not simply sonorous. It is the most mournful-sounding of English vowels, and its frequent repetition in "The Raven" is, to a great extent, responsible for the poem's tone of sadness verging on despair. The example of "The Raven" thus shows



us that it is often essential for the words of a poem to suggest its mood by their sound. Frequently poets use words like "buzz" and "murmur," which imitate natural sounds. Such imitation is called *onomatopoeia*. This device is employed with striking effect in the following lines from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*:

Onomato-  
poeia.

Dry clash'd his harness in the icy caves  
And barren chasms, and all to left and right  
The bare black cliff clang'd round him, as he based  
His feet on juts of slippery crag that rang  
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armèd heels—  
And on a sudden, lo, the level lake,  
And the long glories of the winter moon!

Sir Bedivere, weary and loaded with armor, is carrying the wounded king down over rough ground to the shore of the lake. In picturing the difficult descent, Tennyson uses harsh, guttural consonant sounds, making us actually seem to hear the noise he describes; but when the toil is over and Bedivere has brought his burden to the shore, the poet appropriately shifts to the soft and soothing sounds of the liquid consonants.

Another device frequently used in poetic style, as in "The Raven," is the refrain, which has already been illustrated in our study of rhyme. Less familiar, however, though allied to the refrain, is what is known as parallelism, in which a noun is connected with one adjective and then repeated in connection with a different adjective. Parallelism is conspicuous in Poe's "Ulalume," two lines of which will serve for an example:

Parallelism.

The leaves they were crispèd and sere—  
 The leaves they were withering and sere.

Finally, the choice of meter and stanzaic form, if the poem is to be written in stanzas, may be considered under the head of technique, though the kind of meter and stanza used is probably determined more often by accident or intuition than by deliberate thought. We often see it stated that certain meters are peculiarly suitable for the expression of particular themes, that trochaic rhythms reflect sprightliness and animation because the trochee "trips," and that iambic lines are the best for the treatment of solemn subjects because the iambus is "stately." In all this there is doubtless some truth, but in such matters it is dangerous to generalize, for the great poets have an uncanny skill in bending their medium to their purpose. Of one thing, however, we can be sure. Almost without exception, the form of truly good poems seems to harmonize perfectly with the theme, and in reading them we feel that the author has chosen just the right meter and just the right sort of stanza. Thus the anapaestic meter, as Browning handles it in "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix," immediately suggests the rhythm of galloping horses. In the ninth stanza the effect becomes particularly dramatic:

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,  
 Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,  
 Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,  
 Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;  
 Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,  
 Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

And sometimes the very absence of meter has its advantages. No strictly metrical form could give the effect of peaceful fading so well as the vague rhythm and irregular stanzas of Henley's "Margaritae Sorori":

A late lark twitters from the quiet skies;  
And from the west,  
Where the sun, his day's work ended,  
Lingers as in content,  
There falls on the old, gray city  
An influence luminous and serene,  
A shining peace.

The smoke ascends  
In a rosy-and-golden haze. The spires  
Shine, and are chang'd. In the valley  
Shadows rise. The lark sings on. The sun,  
Closing his benediction,  
Sinks, and the darkening air  
Thrills with a sense of the triumphing night—  
Night with her train of stars  
And her great gift of sleep.

So be my passing!  
My task accomplish'd and the long day done,  
My wages taken, and in my heart  
Some late lark singing,  
Let me be gather'd to the quiet west,  
The sundown splendid and serene,  
Death.<sup>18</sup>

*Our study of poetic technique has shown us that lines of verse are made up of feet, of which the most impor-*

<sup>18</sup> *Poems by William Ernest Henley.* New York (Charles Scribner's Sons), 1922, p. 163. Reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

*tant kinds are the iambic, the trochaic, the anapaestic, and the dactylic; that in scanning a line we mark it off*

*into its constituent feet and identify its*

*Summary. meter by giving the name of the dominant*

*foot, and indicating the number of feet included; that*

*lines with extra syllables at the end are called hyper-*

*catalectic if those syllables cannot be counted as addi-*

*tional feet and catalectic if they can; that in a given*

*meter feet of one kind may, under certain conditions, be*

*substituted for feet of another in order to avoid monot-*

*ony; that within the line there is usually a natural pause*

*called the caesura, and that variation in the position of*

*this pause helps to prevent monotony; that when a line*

*ends with a pause, it is called "end-stopped," but when*

*the thought it expresses runs on into the next line, it is*

*called a "run-on" line. Our study has also shown us*

*that rhyme in general means a correspondence of sounds*

*and that there are three kinds of rhyme—end rhyme,*

*initial rhyme or alliteration, and assonance. Our in-*

*vestigation of poetic technique has also shown us that*

*when lines are brought together in groups similar in a*

*way to paragraphs in prose, they make stanzas, and*

*that stanzas take various forms of which the couplet,*

*the triplet, the quatrain, the ballad stanza, long meter*

*along with Rime Royal, ottava rima, and the Spenserian*

*Stanza are perhaps the most common; and*

*that there are certain poems of fixed rhyme scheme*

*known as French forms, which are characterized by*

*elegance, lightness, and grace. Finally, our study has*

*shown that poets frequently use onomatopoeia, select-*

*ing words which imitate natural sounds; that the use*

*of parallelism is frequent in poetry; and that in the case of good poems the form is appropriate to the theme.*

### QUESTIONS

1. What is a *metrical foot*? 2. What is an *iambus*? 3. What is a *trochee*? 4. What is an *anapaest*? 5. What is a *dactyl*? When is a line said to be *iambic*, *trochaic*, *anapaestic*, *dactylic*? 6. In what ways can we use the term *meter*? 7. What is meant by each of these terms: *monometer*, *dimeter*, *trimeter*, *tetrameter*, *pentameter*, *hexameter*, *heptameter*, *octameter*? 8. What do we do when we "scan" a line? 9. What is a *hypercatalectic* line? 10. What is a *catalectic* line? 11. What is meant by *substitutions*? 12. What is the value of making substitutions? 13. What is meant by *ascending rhythm*? 14. What is meant by *descending rhythm*? 15. What is *anacrusis*? 16. What is the *caesura*? Why do poets shift the position of the *caesura*? 17. When is a line said to be *end-stopped*? 18. When is a line said to be *run-on*? 19. Is rhyme essential to poetry? 20. What is rhyme? When is rhyme said to be *masculine*, when *feminine*? 21. What is meant by the expression *blank verse*? 22. What is *alliteration*? 23. What is *assonance*? 24. What is meant by *refrain*? 25. What is a *stanza*? 26. What does the term *couplet* designate? 27. What is the "*heroic couplet*"? 28. What is meant by the term *triplet*? What is *terza rima*? 29. What is a *quatrain*? What is *ballad meter*? 30. What is *long meter*? 31. What is *short meter*? 32. What is *Rime Royal*? 33. What is *ottava rima*? 34. Who invented the *Spenserian Stanza*? How is the *Spenserian Stanza* formed? 35. What is an *alexandrine*? 36. What are the names of the five "French forms"? 37. What is *onomatopoeia*? 38. What is *parallelism*? 39. What can you say about the choice of meter and stanza?

## EXERCISES

Answer the questions on the following selections, and in each case mark off the lines into feet and identify the meter illustrated:

1. Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear:  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

THOMAS GRAY.

What kind of stanza is this? Are the rhymes masculine or feminine? Point out a place where an anapaest is substituted for an iambus.

2. Oh, may I join the choir invisible  
Of those immortal dead who live again  
In minds made better by their presence; live  
In pulses stirred to generosity,  
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn  
For miserable aims that end with self,  
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,  
And with their mild persistence urge men's search  
To vaster issues.

GEORGE ELIOT.

What kind of verse is this? Point out an *end-stopped* line. Point out a *run-on* line. Comment on the use of the *caesura* in these lines.

3. A little learning is a dangerous thing;  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.

ALEXANDER POPE.

What kind of couplet is this? Point out a *substitution* in the first line. In what way is this substitution peculiarly effective?

4. I slip, I slide, I gloom, I glance,  
Among my skimming swallows;  
I make the netted sunbeam dance  
Against my sandy shallows.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

Point out examples of *alliteration*. Point out a *run-on* line. Is the rhythm *ascending* or *descending*?

5. Most weary seemed the sea, weary the oar,  
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

Show how the sound in these lines echoes the mood. Is assonance illustrated? Point out examples of alliteration.

6. "Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or  
devil!  
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here  
ashore,  
Desolate, yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—  
On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I im-  
plore:  
Is there—*is* there balm in Gilcad?—tell me—tell me I  
implore!"  
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

EDGAR ALLAN POE.

Point out the feminine rhymes. Can you find any examples of alliteration?

7. O strong soul, by what shore  
Tarriest thou now? For that force,  
Surely, has not been left vain!

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

Show how this illustrates assonance.

8. Life is real! Life is earnest!  
And the grave is not its goal;

Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
Was not spoken of the soul.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

Are the second and fourth lines *catalectic* or *hypercatalectic*? Are there any feminine rhymes?

9. To the other lines of verse which are quoted in this book apply the method of study followed in these exercises.

10. Compare and contrast the opinions stated in the following extracts:

. . . our Rhyme (which is an excellency added to this work of measure, and a harmony far happier than any proportion antiquity could ever shew us) doth add more grace, and hath more of delight than ever bare numbers, howsoever they can be forced to run in our slow language, can possibly yield. Which, whether it be derived of *rhythmus* or of romance . . . or howsoever, it is likewise number and harmony of words, consisting of an agreeing sound in the last syllables of several verses, giving both to the ear an echo of a delightful report, and to the memory a deeper impression of what is delivered therein.<sup>19</sup>

### THE VERSE

The measure is English heroic verse without rhyme, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin—rhyme being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame meter; graced indeed since by the use of some famous modern poets, carried away by custom, but much to their own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse, than else they would have expressed them. Not without cause therefore some both Italian and Spanish poets of prime note have rejected rhyme both in longer and shorter works, as have also long since our best English tragedies, as a thing of itself, to all judicious ears, trivial and

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Daniel, *A Defence of Rhyme* in E. D. Jones, *English Critical Essays*. (Oxford University Press), 1922, p. 75.



of no true musical delight; which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another, not in the jingling sound of like endings—a fault avoided by the learned ancients both in poetry and all good oratory. This neglect then of rhyme so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming.<sup>20</sup>

With which point of view do you agree? Why?

<sup>20</sup> Written by Milton and prefixed to the first book of *Paradise Lost*.

## CHAPTER XIII

### LYRIC POETRY

OF the many more or less vaguely definable types which may be distinguished in poetry, one of the most important is the lyric. In the *Poetics* Aristotle did not discuss any type corresponding to the general class which we designate by the term *lyric*; but later, the name *lyrikoi*, derived from *lyra*, the Greek for *lyre*, was applied to poets like Alcaeus and Sappho for whose songs the lyre furnished instrumental accompaniment. The Romans took over the term, and such writers as Horace, Ovid, and Quintilian speak of *lyrici*, or lyric poets, and *lyrica*, or lyrics. This association between lyric poetry and music became traditional and descended to us from the Romans along with the word *lyric*, so that today we are prone to think of a lyric either as a poem actually to be sung, or as a poem markedly musical in quality.

That lyric poetry as a whole is in one way or another more intimately related to music than any other type must indeed be admitted. However, the mere fact that a particular poem is suitable for singing or noteworthy for the beauty of its word-music does not justify us in classifying it as a lyric. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were without doubt chanted to the accompaniment of the lyre; yet they are both epics. And if we turn to those modern poems which have developed an independent word music of their own and no longer need the sup-

port of the singing voice, we shall find that some of the most musical are not lyrics. *Paradise Lost*, one of the most musical of all poems, is an epic. Hymns and simple songs, which require a musical setting, answer very well to the traditional conception of the lyric as a poem to be identified with music; but in the case of most modern lyric poetry, musical quality, though characteristic, cannot be considered a distinguishing characteristic of the type. What today is usually held to be distinctive of the lyric is subjectivity.

Tradition might have associated subjectivity as well as music with those Greek poems which came to be called lyrics. To a greater or less extent they were subjective and in that way differed sharply from the epic and the drama. The lyrics which were sung by one voice rather than by a chorus seem, in most cases, to express the genuinely personal emotions of the poets who composed them. Frequently they are written in the first person, as is Sappho's "Hymn to Venus," the first four lines of which will serve for illustration:

Thou of the throne of many changing hues,  
Immortal Venus, artful child of Jove—  
Forsake me not, O Queen, I pray! nor bruise  
My heart with pain of love.<sup>1</sup>

At other times they are not worded in the first person, but, even so, they suggest the presence of the author or give what might be called the sentiments of some

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Thomas Davidson. From Volume II, the *Columbia University Course in Literature*. Copyright Columbia University Press.

individual who might be the author. A poem of this second kind is "The State" by Alcaeus, which the translation of Sir William Jones has made familiar to English readers:

What constitutes a State?  
 Not high-raised battlements, or labored mound,  
 Thick wall or moated gate;  
 Not cities fair, with spires and turrets crown'd;  
 No:—Men, high-minded men,  
 With powers as far above dull brutes endued  
 In forest, brake, or den,  
 As beasts excel cold rocks and brambles rude:—  
 Men who their duties know,  
 But know their rights, and knowing dare maintain;  
 Prevent the long-aimed blow,  
 And crush the tyrant, while they rend the chain.

Of course, not all Greek poetry which is lyrical in the old sense is included in these poems composed for the single voice. Odes like those of Bacchylides and Pindar, known as chorics because they were sung not by one voice but by a chorus, were likewise rendered to the accompaniment of the lyre. Indeed Pindar's "First Pythian Ode," dedicated to Hieron of Aetna, winner of the chariot race in 474 B.C., opens with an apostrophe to that instrument:

Group  
 Subjectivity.

O Golden lyre,  
 Apollo's dark-haired Muses' joint heirloom,  
 Alert for whom  
 The dancer's footstep listens, and the choir  
 Of singers wait the sound,  
 Beginning of the round

Of festal joy, whene'er thy quivering strings  
Strike up a prelude to their carolings . . .<sup>2</sup>

These poems composed to be sung at celebrations, public or private, held to honor the winners in the Olympic games or similar contests, are subjective in that they celebrate an event of interest to a family or community.

In English poetry the personal is, if anything, even more characteristic of the lyric than in Greek. The Romantic Movement, with its glorification not only of emotion but also of the individual, gave great encouragement to the voicing of personal ideas and emotions. As a result, lyric poetry became increasingly subjective in the hands of the romantic writers; and down to the present time, despite a reaction against romanticism, subjectivity has grown more and more typical of the lyric. Today it is frequently carried to extremes, some poets singing of things so very personal that they make themselves intelligible only to those intimately acquainted with their lives. We see, then, that lyric poetry, viewed either historically or as it is practiced by contemporary writers, is dominantly subjective.

Doubtless, musical quality and subjectivity are the most widely recognized traits of lyric poetry, but there are others. The lyric is characterized by unity, comparative brevity, and intensity of emotional appeal. It also tends to develop its theme according to one simple and definite plan.

<sup>2</sup> Translated by A. G. Newcomer. From Volume II, the *Columbia University Course in Literature*. Copyright Columbia University Press.

In the preface to *The Golden Treasury* Palgrave tells us what guided him in selecting poems for that collection of lyrics:

The Editor is acquainted with no strict and exhaustive definition of Lyrical Poetry, but he has found the task of practical decision increase in clearness and in facility as he advanced with the work, whilst keeping in view a few simple principles. Lyrical has been here held essentially to imply that each poem shall turn on some single thought, feeling or situation. In accordance with this, narrative, descriptive, and didactic poems—unless accompanied by rapidity of movement, brevity and the coloring of human passion—have been excluded.

Unity,  
Brevity,  
and  
Intensity.

This statement makes suggestions which are exceedingly helpful to students of the lyric as a poetic type. If we read a number of poems commonly accepted as lyrics, we shall find that most of them do "turn on some single thought, feeling or situation." This means that the unity of the lyric is derived from concentration upon one thing; whereas the unity of a long narrative poem is necessarily the result of weaving numerous different episodes into a co-ordinated whole. And being compact rather than diffuse, lyric poems tend to be relatively short. Their compression also intensifies the emotional appeal; for there being little in them to distract us, our whole attention is fixed upon one condition or situation and the stimulus to emotion is free to work its full effect undisturbed.

Finally, the lyric, in most cases, follows a simple and characteristic scheme of development. In the case of song-lyrics there is the revelation of some stimulus,

often purely accidental, and then the expression of feeling which the stimulus has aroused. Often the emotion appears to emanate not from the author, but from some one else, the singer, for example. Thus it is Cloten to whom Shakespeare assigns the emotion in the *aubade* in *Cymbeline*, a song which gives effective illustration of the development in question:

Scheme of  
Development.

Hark, hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,  
And Phoebus 'gins arise,  
His steeds to water at those springs  
On chalic'd flowers that lies;  
And winking Mary-buds begin  
To ope their golden eyes:  
With every thing that pretty is,  
My lady sweet, arise;  
Arise, arise!

The simple development of this beautiful song—a development more or less typical of song-lyrics in general—is traced by Professor Erskine as follows:

. . . The stimulus of the dawn is pictured in the first lines; the awakening of the world is imaged in the sun-touched flowers; then the lover's emotion resolves into a cry to his lady to awake. The song comes to its logical end in the word, "Arise!" repeated twice.<sup>3</sup>

In the reflective lyric, where the poet is not trying so much to convey his primary, direct feelings as reproducing a chain of thoughts that follow from the stimulus, the process goes further. In Matthew Arnold's

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted from *Erskine: The Elizabethan Lyric*, p. 10, by permission of Columbia University Press.

"Dover Beach," a notable lyric which exemplifies the meditative type, the sea furnishes the primary stimulus. The sound of the waves breaking upon a moonlit beach brings "the eternal note of sadness in," and thus the stimulus determines the emotional mood of the poem. At the same time it also dominates the meditation by turning the poet's thoughts to the "Sea of Faith," which was "once too at the full." In this poem the conclusion at which the author arrives is stated before the reflecting ends:

Ah, love let us be true  
 To one another! for the world, which seems  
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
 So various, so beautiful, so new,  
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
 And we are here as on a darkling plain  
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,  
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Of all single characteristics subjectivity doubtless comes closest to distinguishing the lyric from other types. But it is important that we keep the other lyric traits in view, for they may help us to classify where the test of subjectivity fails.

Importance of the Less Prominent Traits. Wordsworth's *Prelude*, for instance, and Mrs. Browning's *Aurora Leigh* are both autobiographical, both highly subjective; yet they lack the brevity, the intensity, and the typical unity of the lyric. They illustrate the overlapping of the lyric and the narrative types. They have lyric flavor, but it seems more logical to associate them with narrative poems.



We can say of the lyric, then, that its most distinctive trait is subjectivity, but that it has other important characteristics; that, by and large, it is more intimately related to music than any other kind of poetry; that it

ordinarily turns upon some one thought, feeling, or situation, or presents a single vivid picture, and as a consequence tends to be relatively short and capable of peculiarly strong emotional appeal; and that it is likely to follow a simple and fairly uniform scheme of development as it moves with comparative swiftness from its opening to its close. These general qualities of the lyric show why the genre can be divided formally into sub-classes.

Of the several distinguishable kinds of lyric, the simple song, or song proper, answers best to the traditional conception that a musical origin defines the lyric type.

Songs proper demand or suggest rendition with music. They are frequently brought into the drama for the purpose of ornament and to supply musical relief. The well-known drinking song in *Gammer Gurton's Needle* is typical. In the very first stanza the rollicking rhythm challenges us to sing:

I love no rost but a nut browne toste  
 And a crab<sup>4</sup> layde in the fire.  
 A lytle bread shall do me stead:  
 Much bread I not desire.  
 No froste nor snow, no winde, I trowe,  
 Can hurte mee if I wolde;  
 I am so wrapt, and thorowly lapt  
 Of jolly good ale and old.

<sup>4</sup> Crab apple.

Far more literary but still suitable for actual singing is the *aubade* from *Cymbeline*, already quoted, which also illustrates the use of songs in connection with the drama. In the same general classification with songs like these it is often customary to include certain short lyrics which do not presuppose a musical setting, but are meant to be read. We call them songs because they have some of the attributes which we associate with songs meant to be sung. As a class, songs are marked by comparative simplicity of form and directness of expression.

At the opposite extreme stands the so-called reflective lyric. In this class strong emphasis is placed upon thought. Poems of this kind are not intended for singing; they have a word music of their own.

The Reflective Lyric. In rhythm, in rhyme, in stanzaic structure —for they are written in stanzas as a rule—

and in poetic ornamentation, they are often far more complex than the song. An excellent example of the reflective lyric is Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn,"<sup>5</sup> in which the poet, after brooding over the pathos of universal mutability, expresses the thought, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," making the urn, which has outlasted much change, his spokesman.

Reflection in the lyric may turn on some moral or ethical quality of life and aim at conveying a moral. To this extent the lyric may even become didactic. Such is the case when Keats at the end of his great ode identifies truth with beauty. In Bryant's "To a Water-fowl" the same quality is unmistakable. After watch-

<sup>5</sup> In form this is an Horatian ode. It was not written to be sung, as were Dryden's "St. Cecilia" odes.

ing the bird make its way with confidence through  
 "the desert and illimitable air," Bryant says:

Thou'rt gone! the abyss of heaven  
 Hath swallowed up thy form; yet on my heart  
 Deeply hath sunk the lesson thou hast given,  
 And shall not soon depart.

He who, from zone to zone,  
 Guides through the sky thy certain flight,  
 In the long way that I must tread alone  
 Will lead my steps aright.<sup>6</sup>

A kind of reflective lyric which requires special classification is the elegy. The word *elegy* goes back to the Greek *elegeia*, the meaning of which is obscure. It seems pretty clear, however, that the Greek The Elegy. conception of the elegy as a poetic type differed from ours. Concerning the elegy Horace makes this comment in his *Ars Poetica*:

Verses yoked unequally first embraced lamentation, later also the sentiment of granted prayer; yet who first put forth

<sup>6</sup> Between the extremes represented by highly reflective lyrics like this, and simple songs like the drinking song from *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, a number of minor classifications can be made. For example, we can group together poems which, instead of offering meditation upon some serious subject of universal concern, restrict themselves chiefly to the expression of the poet's own mental or emotional experiences—poems like Keats's "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," which we have quoted in a preceding chapter. Again, we might bring together under the head of *vers de société*, or social verse, a large number of poems which treat such matters as love in the spirit of refined and quiet humor. Such poems are characterized by elegance and grace rather than intensity. They make us feel that they were written by polished and experienced men of the world. The Cavalier Poets were adepts at this kind of composition. Examples are Lyly's "Apelles Song," Campion's "Cherry Ripe," Suckling's "Why So Pale and Wan, Fond Lover?" There is also the epigram, in which some didactic reflection or satirical sentiment is expressed in sharp and quotable language.

humble elegiacs, scholars dispute, and the case is still before the court.<sup>7</sup>

By "verses yoked unequally" Horace designates a kind of couplet composed of a dactylic hexameter line followed by a dactylic pentameter. This couplet Coleridge has imitated by way of illustration as follows:

In the hexameter rises the fountain's silvery column,  
In the pentameter aye falling in melody back.

When poetry was written in this couplet, the Greeks called it elegiac. Horace, as we see, states that originally elegiac poetry "embraced lamentation," and thus suggests our modern conception of the elegy, but the evidence supplied by extant classical poetry does not seem to support him. The earliest examples we have of Greek elegiac verse deal with a variety of subjects, in particular with war and love rather than death. And the same thing is true of the later classical elegies. A poem by the Roman, Tibullus, which is called an elegy is taken up with praise of the simple country life. The mood of this representative stanza could by no means be called elegiac in the modern sense of the word:

Me let my poverty to ease resign;  
While my bright hearth reflects its blazing cheer;  
In season let me plant the pliant vine,  
And, with light hand, my swelling apples rear.<sup>8</sup>

In English literature the classification of a poem as an elegy is not determined by the kind of verse in which it

<sup>7</sup> *Ars Poetica*, lines 75-78. Translated in the Loeb Classical Library. London (William Heinemann). New York (G. P. Putnam's Sons).

<sup>8</sup> From the translation by Sir Charles Elton, *The Universal Anthology*, V, 304.

is written, but by the nature of its theme. Today the term is used of a poem which is composed in honor of a departed friend or laments the transiency of man and his works. A great deal of our earliest poetry is elegiac in tone. The early bards often sang of joys and friends departed, of glories which had passed away, and of men's works which had become the prey of time. The thought of such things called forth some of the best lines in the Old English poem, "The Wanderer," in which we read this:

Surely the wise man may see like the desert  
 How the whole wealth of the world lieth waste,  
 How through the earth the lone dwellings are standing,  
 Blown by the wind and despoiled and defaced.  
 Covered with frost, the proud dwellings are ruined,  
 Crumbled the wine-halls—the king lieth low,  
 Robbed of his pride—and his troop have all fallen  
 Proud by the wall—some the spoil of the foe,  
 War took away—and some the fierce sea-fowl  
 Over the ocean—and some the wolf gray  
 Tore after death—and yet others the hero  
 Sad-faced has laid in earth-caverns away.<sup>9</sup>

The elegiac strain here exemplified runs through English poetry from Anglo-Saxon times down to the immediate present, and thoughts like those uttered here have inspired many of the most beautiful passages in our poetic literature.

Of English elegies five are particularly noteworthy: Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," Milton's "Lycidas," Shelley's *Adonais*, Tennyson's *In Memo-*

<sup>9</sup> Translated by W. R. Sims. From Volume IV, the *Columbia University Course in Literature*. Copyright Columbia University Press.

*riam*, and Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis." Gray's elegy differs from the others in that it was not suggested by the decease of an individual; it is a poem which memorializes the humble dead of an English village. "Lycidas" was written in honor of Edward King, who had been with Milton at Cambridge and was later drowned at sea. Milton tempered its subjectivity, but in dignity and stately music no other elegy has surpassed it. *Adonais*, Shelley's tribute to Keats, is highly subjective, and even more so is *In Memoriam*, in which Tennyson in a series of elegiac poems voiced his recollections of grief for Arthur Hallam. "Thyrsis" honors the poet, Arthur Hugh Clough, who was a friend of Arnold's. It is less well known than the other great English elegies, but is one of the finest things of its kind in the language. Seldom do we find passages which in a certain beauty of sincerity surpass this stanza from "Thyrsis":

And long the way appears, which seem'd so short  
To the unpractised eye of sanguine youth;  
And high the mountain-tops, in cloudy air,  
The mountain tops where is the throne of Truth,  
Tops in life's morning-sun so bright and bare!  
Unbreachable the fort  
Of the long-battered world uplifts its wall;  
And strange and vain the earthly turmoil grows,  
And near and real the charm of thy repose,  
And night as welcome as a friend would fall.

Another kind of lyric which has considerable importance in English literature is the ode. The word is derived from the Greek *ôdê*, which means *song*, and, as we have already seen, the English ode is a direct de-

scendant of Pindar's choral lyrics. Poems of this type are reflective and at the same time related to the song.

The Ode. The form of the Pindaric poem was accommodated to the movements of the chorus by which it was sung. There were similar recurring groups of stanzas, each group containing a strophe, an antistrophe, and an epode. The chorus first moved to the left, singing the strophe, or turn; next it moved to the right, at the same time singing the antistrophe, or counterturn; finally it stood still and sang the epode. These movements were repeated for each group of stanzas to the end of the ode. The stanzaic structure was complicated but regular. The strophe and antistrophe in a given ode had the same form, but differed in form from the strophe and antistrophe of a different ode. The form of the epode always differed from that of the strophe and the antistrophe. The lines of which the stanzas were made up were irregular in length, and thus gave to a regular stanzaic structure the appearance of irregularity.

Some English odes are constructed in imitation of the Greek form. On the whole, however, imitation has not been very successful, and of odes modeled closely after Pindar we have comparatively few. Of these Ben Jonson's ode written to commemorate the friendship between Sir Lucius Cary and Sir Henry Morrison, Gray's ode "The Bard," and Dryden's "St. Cecilia" odes are among the best. Dryden's are particularly interesting. Written actually to be sung in the festivals held to honor the patron saint of music, they illustrate the fact that some lyrics are more adaptable to musical rendition than others. From

English  
Pindaric  
Odes.

the point of view of music the "Alexander's Feast" of 1697 was more successful than the "Song for St. Cecilia's Day" of 1687. The preparation of the earlier ode taught Dryden a good deal about the musical aspect of his problem; consequently when he wrote the second, he had the musical accompaniment more clearly and constantly in view. One easily recognizable result was the repetition of phrases which occurs in "Alexander's Feast." Dryden was thinking of the music when he wrote:

Happy, happy, happy pair!  
 None but the brave,  
 None but the brave,  
 None but the brave deserves the fair.

Among English lyrics classed as odes there are a number formed after the model of Horace. The Roman poet had called a number of his *carmina* odes, although they did not follow the Pindaric scheme. Odes written in similar stanzas of any regular form are now known as Horatian. Examples are Keats's odes and Andrew Marvell's "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland." More frequently, however, the ode in English takes the Cowleyan or irregular form. Cowley wrote his "Pindaric" odes in lines of unequal length; and although later poets have recognized that the Cowleyan form is not truly Pindaric, many of them have adopted it. Notable examples of this irregular form are Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" and Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington."

Horatian  
Odes and  
Irregular  
Odes.



As a type in English literature, the ode is very hard to characterize. Only those which imitate the Pindaric scheme can be identified by their form. Usually, whether it is intended for actual singing or not, the ode is true to its choric origin in that it expresses thoughts and emotions likely to be aroused in a group or a nation by some event of common interest and unusual significance. Sometimes, as in the example just cited from Wordsworth, it may merely voice aspirations and feelings of the poet, though they are of a sort in which other people may share. In any case, the ode should express exalted sentiments in a style marked by great elevation and dignity. Such style is exemplified in Ben Jonson's ode mentioned above, particularly in the third strophe:

Character-  
istics of the  
English  
Ode.

It is not growing like a tree  
 In bulk, doth make men better be;  
 Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,  
 To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere:  
     A lily of a day  
     Is fairer far, in May,  
     Although it fall and die that night;  
     It was the plant and flower of light.  
 In small proportions we just beauties see;  
 And in short measures, life may perfect be.

A kind of lyric which can be definitely classified by its form is the sonnet. The sonnet originated in Italy in the thirteenth century, Guittoni of Arezzo being credited with establishing the laws which govern its structure. By Dante and Petrarch it was brought

very near perfection. Introduced into England by Wyatt and Surrey in the reign of Henry VIII, it became immensely popular and quickly assumed an important position in English poetry.

The  
Sonnet.

The regular or true sonnet is a poem of fourteen iambic pentameter lines. As regards both emotion and thought it is characterized by strict unity and great compression. Among sonnets in English literature two principal types may be distinguished: the Italian, often called the Petrarchan, and sometimes called the Guittonian; and the English, or Shakespearean.

Two Chief  
Types.

In sonnets of the Italian type the first eight lines make up a division known as the octave; the remaining six form another, the sestet. The octave, which is composed of two quatrains, normally rhymes a—b—b—a a—b—b—a. The sestet contains two three-line groups, or tercets. In the rhyme scheme of the sestet great variety is permitted. There may be numerous combinations of three rhymes or of two, but the concluding lines must not form a couplet. Between the octave and the sestet there is a distinct break or pause. Each presents a separate and particular aspect of the one thought expressed by the sonnet, or each sets forth an idea which when brought into the proper relation to the idea offered in the other, helps to develop the one thought brought out by the sonnet. For example, the octave may contain a general statement, the sestet a particular application of the statement; the octave, on the other hand, may state a particular fact, the sestet a generalization based upon

The  
Italian  
Type.

that fact. Often between the thought presented in the octave and that expressed in the sestet the relation is one of contrast, often of comparison, often of cause and effect. At the same time, as Theodore Watts-Dunton and others have pointed out, the emotion which has been translated into the music of the sonnet seems to follow a kind of wave motion, rising in the octave and ebbing in the sestet, or ebbing in the octave and rising in the sestet. This is particularly true of many modern sonnets which are modeled after the Italian form. And the analysis which we have just made can be carried further. The first quatrain discloses the theme, the second develops or illustrates what has been said in the first, the first tercet continues the development and furnishes the transition to the second idea presented or the second aspect of the thought expressed by the sonnet. The second tercet states this second idea often in the very last line.

The Italian form is clearly exemplified in Mr. Louis Untermeyer's sonnet, "Voices":

All day with anxious heart and wondering ear  
 I listened to the city; heard the ground  
 Echo with human thunder, and the sound  
 Go reeling down the street and disappear.  
 The headlong hours, in their wild career,  
 Shouted and sang until the world was drowned  
 With babel voices, each one more profound . .  
 All day it surged—but nothing could I hear.

That night the country never seemed so still;  
 The trees and grasses spoke without a word  
 To stars that brushed them with their silver wings.  
 Together with the moon I climbed the hill,

And in the very heart of Silence heard  
The speech and music of immortal things.<sup>10</sup>

The English sonnet, more often called the Shakespearean because it was the form which Shakespeare adopted, is composed of three quatrains and a concluding couplet, the rhyme scheme being

The English Type. a—b—a—b c—d—c—d e—f—e—f g—g.

The three quatrains develop some aspect of the general theme; then with epigrammatic swiftness the couplet, by answering a question, by making a summary, by drawing a comparison, by bringing forth a contrast, or in some other way, completes the thought expressed by the sonnet. In Shakespeare's thirtieth sonnet the relation between the thought in the couplet and the ideas which precede is one of sharp contrast:

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past,  
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:

Then can I drown an eye, unus'd to flow,  
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,  
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,  
And moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight:

Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,  
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er  
The sad account of fore-bemoan'd moan,  
Which I new pay as if not paid before.

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,  
All losses are restor'd and sorrows end.

<sup>10</sup> From *Challenge* by Louis Untermeyer. Reprinted by permission of and special arrangement with Harcourt, Brace and Company.

In the *Amoretti* Spenser modified the English form, which, as we must not forget, existed long before Shakespeare adopted it.<sup>11</sup> Spenser interlaced the rhymes of the quatrains to produce the following scheme of rhymes: a—b—a—b b—c—b—c c—d—c—d e—e. Sonnets of the English type which rhyme in this fashion are called Spenserian after Spenser. The following example is taken from the *Amoretti*:

The  
Spenserian  
Sonnet.

Fayre eyes, the myrrour of my mazed hart,  
What wondrous vertue is contaynd in you,  
The which both lyfe and death forth from you dart  
Into the object of your mighty view?  
For when ye mildly look with lovely hew,  
Then is my soule with lyfe and love inspired:  
But when ye lowre, or looke on me askew,  
Then doe I die, as one with lightning fyred.  
But since that lyfe is more than death desyred,  
Looke ever lovely, as becomes you best,  
That your bright beams, of my weak eies admyred,  
May kindle living fire within my brest.  
Such lyfe should be the honor of your light,  
Such death the sad ensample of your might.

Worth mentioning also is the Miltonian sonnet, a modified form of the Italian. Instead of observing the break between the octave and the sestet, Milton preferred to join them together by continuing the last sentence of the octave into the sestet. This is a form

<sup>11</sup> Wyatt and Surrey, who introduced the sonnet into English literature, were both familiar with the Italian form, but, strange to say, both ended their sonnets with couplets. In other respects Wyatt's were like those of the Italians; Surrey experimented with the sonnet and produced examples in the English style.

of enjambment, to use the technical term. A notable example of this can be found in Milton's sonnet on his blindness. For citation we may take a more recent sonnet "in Miltonic mould" by Wordsworth:

The  
Miltonian  
Sonnet.

The World is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!  
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;  
The winds that will be howling at all hours;  
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;  
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

Sonnets may occur as single, independent pieces, or may be grouped together. Such sequences may vaguely express the progress of some emotional experience in the life of the poet or may actually tell a story in sonnet stanzas. The *Vita Nuova* of Dante suggests a sonnet sequence. It is made up of lyrics, most of them sonnets, with prose commentaries thrown in between. Petrarch's *To Laura in Life* and *To Laura in Death* are each such a series. The *Amoretti* of Spenser tell a connected story, but probably Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* should be called the first true English sonnet sequence. Then it became the fashion to write sonnets, and many were

Sonnet  
Sequences.

produced which followed the influence of outside sources—Italy and France. But the outstanding sonnet sequence is Shakespeare's, published in 1609. Scholars have written a library about the sources, trying to determine how closely the author was guided by foreign influences, and to identify the persons and events vaguely described. But all that is secondary. The important thing is that any one who reads them feels that here is a great heart and mind laying itself bare under the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." In the seventeenth century John Donne, a poet who has recently been receiving much attention, wrote a sequence which he called *Holy Sonnets*. Among nineteenth-century examples Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The House of Life* are especially noteworthy. Modern sequences, though usually shorter than those just mentioned, are numerous. In Mr. Houston Peterson's *The Book of Sonnet Sequences* we find, along with older examples, sequences by George Santayana, Eugene Lee-Hamilton, William Ellery Leonard, Rupert Brooke, Alan Seeger, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Thomas S. Jones, Jr., and Conrad Aiken.

In the preface to Mr. Peterson's book is an interesting paragraph on the sonnet's present state. Let us quote this as we conclude our own brief study of the sonnet,

<p>Present State of the Sonnet.</p>	<p>which, we must not forget, is one of the most strictly conventional of all poetic forms:</p>
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In the present period of literary anarchy, of aesthetic radicalism, the sonnet has more than held its own in the fine

achievements of such different poets as John Masefield, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Rupert Brooke, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Edgar Lee Masters, George Sterling, Arthur Davison Ficke, W. W. Gibson, and Elinor Wylie. Fiery leaders in the free verse movement of ten years ago are now turning to the traditional quatorzain. And David Morton even shows that in the twentieth century new values are being given to the sonnet in the way of informality, intimacy, character portraiture, and singing lyricism.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, we may include with lyric poetry a type known as the dramatic lyric. To this type, which combines traits of the lyric and the drama, Robert Browning gave prominence. Browning himself vaguely defines it. In 1842 he published the third number of *Bells and Pomegranates*, grouping together a collection of short poems as *Dramatic Lyrics*. Of them he says:

Such poems . . . might also come properly enough, I suppose, under the head of *Dramatic Pieces*; being, though often lyric in expression, always Dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine.

These poems are lyric in form. They are written in stanzas, or at any rate in rhyme, rather than in dramatic blank verse. Besides, they have pretty much all of the other lyric qualities except subjectivity. Instead, they have dramatic objectivity, the sentiments expressed being not Browning's but those of imaginary characters. And again they are dramatic because in each case an imaginary person presents some crisis or moment of ten-

<sup>12</sup> *The Book of Sonnet Sequences*, edited by Houston Peterson. New York and London (Longmans, Green and Co.), 1929.



sion in his own experience. However, he communicates his experience directly or indirectly to us rather than to some other person who has shared in it. We seem to hear the narrator talking to us or to overhear him talking to himself; we are not made to feel that he is acting out a scene before us as if on a stage. Therein lies the difference between the dramatic lyric and the dramatic monologue. In the dramatic monologue the narration seems addressed to another character whose presence is implied, and as a result we imagine that the incident is being acted before us. In "My Last Duchess," one of Browning's best dramatic monologues, although the Duke of Ferrara alone speaks, the presence of another nobleman's emissary is made clear. To this emissary the Duke's words are addressed:

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive. I call  
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands  
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read  
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,  
But to myself they turned (since none puts by  
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)  
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,  
How such a glance came there; so, not the first  
Are you to turn and ask thus. . . .

"Meeting at Night," a dramatic lyric, is different. A second character is mentioned at the very end, but there is nothing to make us feel that we are hearing one end of

a dialogue. There is no second person to "turn" and "ask" and thus to affect the course of the narrator's words. We have narration, not conversation:

The gray sea and the long black land;  
And the yellow half-moon large and low;  
And the startled little waves that leap  
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,  
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,  
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;  
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;  
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch  
And blue spurt of a lighted match,  
And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,  
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

*In this chapter we have seen that the lyric is, in general, characterized by musical quality, subjectivity, unity, comparative brevity, and intensity of emotional appeal. And we have seen that the lyric type embraces the song, which is simple, direct, concerned more with emotion than with thought, and usually suitable for musical rendition; the reflective lyric, which is more complex than the song, places much emphasis upon thought, and is often more or less didactic; the elegy which laments the dead or voices the feeling of sadness aroused by contemplation of ruin and change; the ode which in dignified and serious style expresses sentiments to which a group or a nation might subscribe; the sonnet, which is a short poem of fixed form, setting forth with grace and beauty some single*

*idea; and the dramatic lyric, in which lyrical and dramatic qualities are combined.*

### QUESTIONS

1. What is the origin of the term *lyric*? 2. Can we classify a poem as a lyric simply because it is musical in quality? 3. In what ways were Greek lyrics subjective? 4. What can you say about the subjectivity of English lyrics? 5. What traits are typical of English lyrics besides musical quality and subjectivity? 6. What scheme of development is typical of the lyric? 7. What is the importance of the minor lyric traits? 8. What are the characteristics of the song, the reflective lyric, the elegy, the ode? 9. Can you name five great English elegies? 10. What are the three kinds of ode found in English literature, and how do they differ? 11. What can you say about the origin of the sonnet? 12. What are the characteristics of the Italian sonnet, the Shakespearean, the Spenserian, the Miltonian? 13. What can you say about sonnet sequences? 14. What are the outstanding traits of the dramatic lyric?

### EXERCISES

1. Here is an interesting definition of the lyric:

The lyrical form is in fact the simplest verbal vesture of an instant of emotion, a rhythmical cry such as ages ago cheered on the man who pulled at the oar or dragged stones up a slope. He who utters it is more conscious of the instant of emotion than of himself as feeling emotion.<sup>13</sup>

Of what kind of lyric poetry do you consider this particularly true? Why? In answering, take note especially of the last sentence.

<sup>13</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. (Viking Press and B. W. Huebsch), 1925, p. 251.

2. The lyric is, beyond any other form of poetical expression, the vehicle of personal emotion.<sup>14</sup>

By reference to the works of literature which you have read, argue that this is or is not true.

3. . . . Literature includes all writings that express for us what we consciously or unconsciously feel the need of saying but cannot. It includes the prose and verse that find us at most points, that take our half-formed thoughts, our suppressed moods, our stifled desires, and lead them out into harmony and completeness.<sup>15</sup>

Show why this is particularly true of lyric poetry. Is it true of the drama?

4. It is equally important to remember that all Greek lyric is essentially "occasional poetry" in the best sense, i.e. verse produced for special occasions, and preserved, if at all, because it was thought to be worth preserving.<sup>16</sup>

Can you think of any "occasional" poems in English literature which are likely to survive? Are they lyrics?

5. "In harmony with Nature?" Restless fool,  
Who with such heat dost preach what were to thee,  
When true, the last impossibility—  
To be like Nature strong, like Nature cool!

Know, man hath all which Nature hath, but more,  
And in that *more* lie all his hopes of good.  
Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood;  
Nature is stubborn, man would fain adore;

Nature is fickle, man hath need of rest;  
Nature forgives no debt, and fears no grave;  
Man would be mild, and with safe conscience blest.

<sup>14</sup> Bliss Perry, *A Study of Prose Fiction*. Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1903, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> C. Alphonso Smith, *What Can Literature Do for Me?* New York (Doubleday, Doran and Company), 1913, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> E. D. Perry, "Lyric Poetry" in *Greek Literature*. New York (Columbia University Press), 1912, p. 64.

Man must begin, know this, where Nature ends;  
Nature and men can never be fast friends.  
Fool, if thou canst not pass her, rest her slave.

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

What type of sonnet does this represent? In your own words summarize what Matthew Arnold says.

## CHAPTER XIV

### NARRATIVE POETRY AND OTHER TYPES

**I**N narrative poetry we at last meet with a type which is easy to define. Narrative poetry tells a story; and any poem which tells a story is narrative, whatever else it may be at the same time. The most important kinds of narrative poetry are the ballad, the epic, the metrical romance, and the rhymed tale.

Narrative  
Types.

"The ballad," says Professor Kittredge, "is a song that tells a story, or—to take the other point of view—a story told in song." Probably no better definition of the ballad can be given. Since ballads are lyrics to the extent that they are songs and narratives because they tell stories, they are often called narrative lyrics. They may be grouped in two general subdivisions, one containing the popular, or traditional, ballads, the other the literary ballads, which are frequently termed art-ballads.

The Ballad.

Concerning the origin of the popular ballad, scholars are hotly at odds; but with their controversy we need not meddle. Whether ballads in their earliest forms—forms of which we have no record—came into being when a primitive throng celebrated with song and dance some event of great common import and interest, each member improvising and contributing his verse, so that the sum of the verses

Origin.

formed a song—in other words, whether the origin of the ballad type was communal, or whether the earliest ballads were the product of individual authorship, is an interesting question for speculation and study, but one which has no vital importance here. It is agreed that extant ballads like those in Professor Child's monumental collection, which do not represent the earliest stages of ballad-making, are, certainly in most cases, the work of individual authors; and it is agreed that they are anonymous.

What is important is the fact that the authors of the extant ballads are unknown. Modern literary compositions in ballad form are not published orally as the traditional ballads were; they are printed. The consequences are that their authorized form is fixed and their authorship established. The recorded popular ballads, on the other hand, have no authorized fixed form, but only the form in which they were copied down from the lips of the folk after having passed through a period—probably a long period—of oral transmission, in which process of being told and retold, or, to be more accurate, sung and resung, the original form of each has undergone mutation.

Not only is it true that the authors of the popular ballads are unknown, but it is also true that they have left us no pictures of themselves in their work. These ballads are supremely, if not absolutely, objective. When we read them, we are not conscious of an author's personality; our whole attention is centered in the story, as if it were telling itself.

The popular ballads are composed in stanzas—almost

invariably in one of two kinds. The stanza may be a couplet made up of lines which have four accents each, or it may be the familiar "ballad stanza," which we have already studied. In versification the ballads are usually uneven and not infrequently crude. In style they are simple and direct. Often they have a refrain and often what is known as "incremental repetition"; that is, a stanza repeats the preceding stanza with such variations as are necessary to advance the story. Both incremental repetition and refrain are illustrated in the last four stanzas of "Lord Randal":

Metrical  
Structure.

"What d'ye leave to your mother, Lord Randal, my son?  
What d'ye leave to your mother, my handsome young man?"  
"Four and twenty kye; mother, mak my bed soon,  
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down."

"What d'ye leave to your sister, Lord Randal, my son?  
What d'ye leave to your sister, my handsome young man?"  
"My gold and my silver; mother, mak my bed soon,  
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down."

"What d'ye leave to your brother, Lord Randal, my son?  
What d'ye leave to your brother, my handsome young man?"  
"My houses and my lands; mother, mak my bed soon,  
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down."

"What d'ye leave to your true-love, Lord Randal, my son?  
What d'ye leave to your true-love, my handsome young man?"

"I leave her hell and fire; mother, mak my bed soon,  
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The complete ballad will be found in the Cambridge Edition of the *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, edited by Professor Kittredge. Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), p. 22.



The recorded ballads vary in length. Some present a single episode, often narrating with dramatic effect a crisis in a longer story which is otherwise left untold.<sup>2</sup>

Some, on the contrary, like *A Gest of Robyn Hode*, are composed of several episodes strung together into a longer narrative. They treat of diverse subjects: love, jealousy, war, outlawry, revenge, death, the supernatural—almost anything which fires the imagination of the folk. Some repeat material found in the common stock of folklore; some are based upon historical events. But whatever be their themes, the old ballads are well worth studying both because of their own intrinsic merit and because of their important influence upon later English poetry. Many of our best writers have praised them, one of the sincerest tributes ever paid them being that which Oliver Goldsmith bestowed upon two of his favorites—"The Cruelty of Barbara Allen," and the stirring "Johnny Armstrong," a ballad based upon historical fact:

The music of the finest singer is dissonance to what I felt when our old dairy-maid sung me into tears with Johnny Armstrong's Last Good-night or The Cruelty of Barbara Allen.

And Goldsmith's enthusiasm can easily be understood, for Professor Francis B. Gummere, in the introduction

<sup>2</sup> A good illustration is "Child Maurice" (Number 83 in Professor Child's collection), on the story of which a tragedy, John Home's *Douglas*, was founded, and of which Thomas Gray says: "It is divine . . . Aristotle's best rules are observed in it in a manner which shows the author had never heard of Aristotle. It begins in the fifth act of the play. You may read it two thirds through without guessing what it is about; and yet, when you have come to the end, it is impossible not to understand the whole story." Gray's *Works*, ed. Gosse, II, 316.

to his book of old ballads has summed up the whole matter when he says:

Sincere, strong, rough, these "canticles of love and woe" still speak the speech of a mass, still feel as a community feels, and touch the heart not as a whisper of private sympathy, but as a great cry of delight or grief from the crowd.<sup>3</sup>

The literary ballad, usually known as the art-ballad, is relatively modern. It is a poem written and disseminated like other modern poems, but imitating the ballad style. The publication of Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* in 1765 and of other collections of popular ballads and songs, notably Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-1803), aroused great interest in the old ballads. Their "perfection of simplicity," to use a phrase which Addison had applied to them some time before, made strong appeal to the poets of the Romantic Movement, who, as we remember, were protesting against the artificiality of pseudo-classicism. Soon the romanticists began to imitate the popular style and to produce art-ballads. A number appeared in the collection of poems which Wordsworth and Coleridge published in 1798—the famous *Lyrical Ballads*. Among these was Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner."

"The Ancient Mariner" is written in the ballad style and stanza. It has the popular virtues of simplicity and directness combined with a literary finish which could be derived only from conscious art. The influence of the traditional ballad can be detected in the following stanzas, but no one

<sup>3</sup> *Old English Ballads*, edited and selected by Francis B. Gummere. Boston (Ginn and Company), 1894. Introduction, xcvi.

would suspect them of having come fresh from the stream of oral transmission:

All in a hot and copper sky,  
The bloody Sun, at noon,  
Right up across the mast did stand,  
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean.

There are also many shorter art-ballads which develop single episodes. Frequently these shorter imitative poems treat of just such situations as might give rise to traditional ballads. Wordsworth's "Lucy Gray; or, Solitude" is a good example. This poem is founded upon an actual occurrence. It tells of a little girl, who, bewildered in a snowstorm, lost her way, fell into a canal, and was drowned. Thus "Lucy Gray" not only reflects the form and manner of the popular ballad, but it also deals with the same kind of material. We find another good example in "Lord Ullin's Daughter" by Thomas Campbell. A Highland chieftain running away with the daughter of Lord Ullin is closely pursued by the angry father and his retainers. The fugitives come to a ferry; and though a violent storm is raging, they persuade the ferryman to risk a passage. The father arrives on the shore, sees the danger, and offers forgiveness too late:

"Come back! come back!" he cried in grief,  
"Across this stormy water:

And I'll forgive your Highland chief,  
My daughter! Oh, my daughter!"

'Twas vain: the loud waves lashed the shore,  
Return or aid preventing;  
The waters wild went o'er his child,  
And he was left lamenting.

Of the many fine art-ballads which have been composed since the appearance of "The Ancient Mariner" we should at least note, in passing, Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci," Macaulay's "Horatius at the Bridge," Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Sister Helen," Southey's ballads and metrical tales, and R. S. Hawker's stirring but less known Cornish ballads. Of recent poems in the ballad style one of the most spirited is "The Highwayman" by Alfred Noyes—a poem which departs from the strict simplicity of the old form, yet reproduces the peculiar dramatic quality often present in the traditional ballads. It uses the common material—love, outlawry, violent death. To the Highwayman came the report of how "Bess, the landlord's daughter," had given her life to warn him. And then—

Back he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,  
With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier  
brandished high!  
Blood-red were his spurs i' the golden noon; wine-red was  
his velvet coat,  
When they shot him down on the highway,  
Down like a dog on the highway,  
And he lay in his blood on the highway, with the bunch of  
lace at his throat.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Reprinted by permission from "The Highwayman" in *Collected Poems*, Volume I, by Alfred Noyes. Copyright, 1906, by Frederick A. Stokes Company.

Those ballads which combine several episodes into a longer story suggest another narrative type—the epic.<sup>5</sup> An epic poem, as Aristotle tells us, is made up of many actions.<sup>6</sup> A true epic takes stories about the deeds of some hero or heroes, real or fictitious—usually the traditional heroes of a race—and works them, along with other appropriate material, into a continuous narrative organic in structure and elevated in style.<sup>7</sup>

Epic poems may be divided into two general classes, as was the case with the ballad. In one we may group the old, or authentic, epics; in the other the epics of later date, which we may term secondary. Among those of the derivative class are some which are more or less closely modeled after those in the first group. The Greek *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the old English *Beowulf*, the old French *Song of Roland*, and the Germanic *Nibelungenlied* are authentic epics; Virgil's *Aeneid*, Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* are secondary epics. Of these the *Aeneid*, which copies many features of the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, is the best imitation of the authentic type.

Although the authentic epics do not represent primi-

<sup>5</sup> An excellent example is *A Gest of Robyn Hode*. Professor Child includes this in his collection, but he says that it is "a popular epic composed of several ballads by a poet of a thoroughly congenial spirit."

<sup>6</sup> *Poetics*, XXIV, 4.

<sup>7</sup> The etymology of the word *epic* does little towards helping us characterize epic poetry. The word goes back ultimately to the Greek *epos* which meant *word*, *narrative*, or *song*. The Greeks used the plural form of *epos* with reference to poems composed in dactylic hexameter verse, the meter of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; and Aristotle used the term *epopoia*, a compound of *epos*, when referring to the Homeric poems and the type to which they belong. These etymologies do little more than remind us that epic poetry is narrative.

tive poetry, some of them being works of highly conscious literary art, they stand in close relation to remote times—to the childhood of the peoples who produced them. They image the life and ideals of early society with a freshness and verisimilitude which the secondary epics never approximate. In the times with which the authentic epics deal, great racial stores of heroic lays preserved the memory of important persons and their exploits. Of the prevalence of these lays we find proof in the epics themselves. Homer makes frequent reference to minstrels who sing of heroes and momentous deeds. In the *Odyssey* men of high rank and great reputation treat the minstrel Demodocus with respect and welcome his songs with eager attention. And in *Beowulf* we find convincing evidence that the composition and singing of lays had a prominent place in early tribal life. Not many hours after Beowulf has accomplished the feat of mortally wounding Grendel the deed becomes the subject of song:

At times a thane of the king, a proud<sup>8</sup> man—one that remembered many old traditions—devised poetic<sup>9</sup> words bound faithfully into verse,—would begin skillfully to recite Beowulf's exploit.<sup>10</sup>

Apparently the stories told in those old lays were sometimes true, sometimes distorted and exaggerated by long retelling, sometimes purely mythical; but clearly they dealt with matters in which the people were deeply

<sup>8</sup> Literally "vaunt-laden."

<sup>9</sup> Literally "another word," that is, "different from the diction of ordinary conversation."

<sup>10</sup> Literally "journey."

interested. And in time the accumulated body of such poetry which expressed the common interests of a race became a living record of its achievements, customs, traditions, beliefs, and ideals. From such material, chiefly, the old epics were unquestionably derived; and this derivation helps to account for the vividness with which they reflect racial character, for when the early poet made an epic by fusing matter drawn selectively from the lays of his people and from similar sources, it is easy to see that his work would reflect something of the spirit of his race.

But the true epic represents more than the mere fusing of lays and sagas into a larger whole. It sets forth the significant deeds of some conspicuous national hero,

Epics as National Poems. recounting them in such sequence as will produce a simple story, or sometimes, as in the case of the Homeric poems, using them as the basis of a well-ordered plot. As a result, the authentic epics and most of those in the secondary group are characterized by what we should call today a spirit of nationalism. Though the old epics come from peoples that were not nations in the modern sense of the word, they may be called national poems because they express the pride those peoples felt in their traditional heroes.

The essential story of the early epic is usually quite simple. This is true even of the *Odyssey* of which Aristotle has given us the following summary:

Episodic Structure. A certain man is absent from home for many years; he is jealously watched by Poseidon, and left desolate. Meanwhile

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his home is in a wretched plight—suitors are wasting his substance and plotting against his son. At length tempest-tost, he himself arrives; he makes certain persons acquainted with him; he attacks the suitors with his own hand, and is himself preserved while he destroys them. This is the essence of the plot; the rest is episodes.<sup>11</sup>

And, to cite another example, the essential story of the old-English *Beowulf* is simply the recounting of three of the hero's exploits in the order in which they occurred:

Hearing that King Hrothgar of the Danes is being persecuted by a monster named Grendel, Beowulf comes from the land of the Geats to offer assistance. He mortally wounds Grendel, and next kills Grendel's mother, who has sought to avenge her son. He returns home and is finally made king. In his old age he meets a redoubtable dragon in mortal combat. He is victorious but loses his life.

Again "the rest is episodes." But when we take into account these episodes, plundered freely from the racial stock of song and story and worked in with the main events to form an organic narrative, the old epics cannot be so concisely summarized. Indeed the length of the epic is one of its striking traits. Poems of other types seldom equal it in length. But despite its length it has unity. When we read an epic, we progress steadily towards a definite goal. However, we do not follow the shortest path; for the episodes constantly lead us into detours little and great. In other words, the epic moves in a leisurely manner; but it moves with dignity

<sup>11</sup> From S. H. Butcher, *The Poetics of Aristotle*. London, 1911, p. 65. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.



—with a kind of majestic sweep, its episodes giving it scope, and richness, and variety.

Another characteristic of old epic poetry is its tendency to give a prominent place to the supernatural and to the marvelous. In *Beowulf* the hero loaded with thirty suits of armor swims safely through the ocean waves, while in the *Odyssey* the sorceress, Circe, turns the followers of Odysseus into swine. And of the many marvels recounted in the epics these are but two examples. In *Beowulf* we do not actually meet with the supernatural, though the suggestion of impelling fate is ever present; but the gods and goddesses themselves enter into the very texture of the Homeric poems. They descend frequently from Olympus to mingle with men and to shape the course of events of which their own jealousies have often been the inciting cause. Marvelous occurrences and supernatural characters are likewise to be found in the secondary epics. In the *Aeneid* Virgil constantly copies such things from Homer, and in *Paradise Lost* Milton deals with supernatural persons as much as with human beings.

Epic poetry tends to be written in uniform verse rather than in stanzas. Certain meters are preferred.<sup>12</sup>

The Greeks and Romans used the dactylic hexameter; the Anglo-Saxon poets found a four-stress alliterative line best suited to their purpose; modern English writers almost invariably choose unrhymed iambic pentameter lines (blank

The Supernatural and the Marvelous.

Meter and Style.

<sup>12</sup> Exceptions are not difficult to find. The *Nibelungenlied* and Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* are written in stanzas.

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verse).<sup>13</sup> The style typical of the epic is calm and serious, elevated and majestic. These qualities are exhibited in the old epics as well as in the modern. And such poetry as a whole is objective. It is true that we come across a touch of subjectivity once in a while. In *Beowulf*, for example, there are a few scattered sentences written in the first person, comments by the poet or by a scribe, and in *Paradise Lost* there is the famous invocation to light with its reference to Milton's blindness:

Thus with the year  
Seasons return; but not to me returns  
Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,  
Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,  
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine.

This is subjective. But passages of this kind and occasional brief personal comments do not affect the general objective character of the epics. The business of the epic poet is to tell his story without interposing his own views or impressions, and, by and large, he sticks to his business. Homer, indeed, has been called the most objective of all poets.

The presentation of a racial or national hero and his deeds—almost invariably warlike exploits—in an essentially simple story; the development of a basic story by the use of subsidiary episodes into a sustained narrative; the habit of bringing in the marvelous and the supernatural; the observance of objectivity; the use of a style marked by seriousness, calm, and majesty; and the tendency to employ uniform verse—these may be considered the dis-

Summary  
of Epic  
Traits.

<sup>13</sup> Pope is an exception. He used the heroic couplet when translating Homer.

tinguishing traits of epic poetry. In the primary epics they appear quite consistently; but when we look for them in particular poems of the secondary group, we do not always find all of them. Among the secondary examples Virgil's *Aeneid* probably illustrates these traits best.

In spirit, style, and construction the *Aeneid* of Virgil of all poems in its group stands closest to the authentic epics. It imitates the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* not only in a general way but also in many details. Virgil took a story which had been told some three hundred years before, in the *Bellum Punicum* of Naevius, and developed it into a great national poem comprising twelve books of dactylic hexameter verse. It is the story of the escape of the Trojan Aeneas from the destruction of Troy, his wanderings, and his final settlement in Italy to become the founder of the Roman empire. The first six books deal with the wanderings of Aeneas, as the *Odyssey* deals with those of Odysseus; the last six describe the wars waged by the hero after his arrival in Italy and remind us of the *Iliad* with its account of the battles round Troy. Indeed, the *Aeneid* has been called "an *Odyssey* of wanderings, followed by an *Iliad* of battles." It has all the outward marks of the true epic. It makes Aeneas into a national hero; it glorifies the Roman race; in Homeric fashion it takes a simple story and bringing into it numerous subsidiary episodes gives it length, richness, and variety; it introduces the mythical legends of Italy; it uses the traditional meter of the Greek epics; and it exemplifies the true heroic style. But the *Aeneid* lacks the essential tone and spirit of its models. Though the work of in-

The  
*Aeneid*.

dividuals must have gone into the old epics, the authors of those poems shaped into literary form materials which had grown, as we have seen, out of the very life of their people. Much—probably most—of the matter which went into the *Aeneid* was, on the contrary, not indigenous; Aeneas himself was a Trojan, not a man of Latin blood. And even in the last six books, where borrowing from abroad is less conspicuous, Virgil was not sufficiently in touch with the remote times which he was describing to be able to picture them with the freshness and realism typical of the earlier epic poetry. Great as it unquestionably is, the *Aeneid* seems artificial when compared to the authentic models. Such artificiality can hardly be avoided when a poet belonging to a period when his race has attained maturity tries to re-create imaginatively the life and spirit of its childhood. He may write a great epic, but it will have a derivative note.

The pre-eminent secondary epic in English literature is, of course, Milton's *Paradise Lost*.<sup>14</sup> This poem is a good example of those later works which do not exhibit all the traits characteristic of the type. It is not, like the *Iliad*, a poem reflecting the historical spirit of a race. Its very theme prevents it from being national in that sense. It tells the story of the fall of man—a story which originated long before any English nation existed. It is national, however, to the extent that it deals with this foreign theme as only an Englishman would interpret it. We cannot dissociate *Paradise Lost* from England any more

<sup>14</sup> Milton had thought of writing an epic about King Arthur, but the coming of civil war interfered with his plan; and when he returned to the idea years later, he chose the religious subject treated in *Paradise Lost*.

than we could think of Dante's *Divine Comedy* as being produced outside of Italy. Apart from these distinctions, it follows the universal type. In the vastness of its scope *Paradise Lost* is indeed an epic of epics. Where the *Iliad* shows us armies of mortal men meeting in battle, with now and then a god or a goddess appearing on the scene, it pictures legions of heavenly angels in titanic conflict with the mighty hosts of Satan. The impression of immensity which it produces reminds us rather of the vast supernatural motion of the Hindu epics, only here more artistically organized. This quality can best be described in the words of James Russell Lowell:

In reading *Paradise Lost* one has a feeling of vastness. You float under an illimitable sky, brimmed with sunshine or hung with constellations; the abysses of space are about you; you hear the cadenced surges of an unseen ocean; thunders mutter round the horizon, and when the scene changes, it is with an elemental movement like the shifting of mighty winds.<sup>15</sup>

The other epic traits in *Paradise Lost* we need not discuss, except to note the fact that Milton in a number of ways imitates the classical models. He follows Virgil in dividing his material into twelve books, he gives an invocation and then plunges *in medias res*, and he writes in uniform verse. Sometimes he even imitates the contents of the Homeric poems and of the *Aeneid*. For instance, the muster of the forces of Satan reminds us of the muster of the troops in the Latin epic, and of the catalogue of the ships in the *Iliad*.

<sup>15</sup> From Lowell's essay on Milton. See *The Works of James Russell Lowell*, Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), IV, 99.

Many of the secondary epics differ from the primary not only in that they are, at least to some extent, copies rather than originals, and not only in that they fail to display all the traits of the type, but also in that they give prominence to romantic love.

Romantic  
Epics.

The chief interest of the old epic poets was war; they paid comparatively little attention to love. In *Beowulf* there is no mention of love in connection with the hero unless there be a faint suggestion of it at the very end of the poem, when after the hero's death a woman, who may have been his wife, chants a lament as his body is given to the flames of the funeral pyre. And in the *Song of Roland* there is again no mention of love except that we are told at the close of the poem how Aude the Fair died of grief when she heard of Roland's death. In the *Odyssey*, to be sure, there is the episode of Calypso, and in other authentic epics the element of love may at times enter to a greater or less extent, but it is normally subsidiary. Virgil is the first of the great masters of the genre who stresses love. This he does in the famous episode of Dido. The Italian poets, Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso, however, make love a pervasive theme of their narrative, and the emphasis which they give it distinguishes them from their predecessors. The *Song of Roland* presents its hero as a fighter; the *Orlando Innamorato* of Boiardo presents the same character not only as a fighter, but also, and even more conspicuously, as a romantic lover. Boiardo did not finish his poem, and Ariosto, taking up the story where it had broken off, wrote the *Orlando Furioso*, in which he depicts Roland as mad from love for an Oriental princess. It is significant that with this change the more

solemn note of the epic is lost and comedy intrudes. And although Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* endeavors more to maintain the serious dignity of the ancient models, nevertheless it likewise emphasizes love and stands among the romantic epics. From such Italian poems as these, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* in large measure drew its inspiration, and it may be called a romantic epic.

Since the loftiness of manner and the tendency to exaggerate easily invite parody, it is not surprising that a fine specimen of what is called the mock-epic appeared early. The Greek *Batrachomyomachia*, or *The Mock-epic. Battle of the Frogs and Mice*, a poem of which the exact date is unknown but which was certainly written several hundred years before Christ, is a clever burlesque of the *Iliad*. It was once attributed to Homer, perhaps deliberately, as has been suggested, to "heighten the absurdity." The following summary of the plot, taken from Mahaffy's *History of Classical Greek Literature*, will make clear the nature of the burlesque:

A mouse, after escaping from the pursuit of a cat, is slaking its thirst at a pond, when it is accosted by a frog, King Puff-cheek, the son of Peleus (in the sense of muddy), who asks it to come and see his home and habits. The mouse consents, but the sudden appearance of an otter terrifies the frog, and makes him dive, leaving the mouse to perish, after sundry epic exclamations and soliloquies. A bystanding mouse brings the tidings to the tribe, who forthwith prepare for war, and arm themselves, sending a formal declaration to the frogs. The deliberations of Zeus and Athena, as to what part they will take in the war, are really comic, and a very clever

parody on Homer. Then follows quite an epic battle, with deliberate inconsistencies, such as the reappearance of several heroes already killed. The frogs are worsted, and the victorious mice are not even deterred by the thunder of Zeus, but are presently put to flight by the appearance of an army of crabs to assist the defeated frogs.<sup>16</sup>

In this poem we see how easily trivial occurrences may be represented as if they were events of tremendous importance and commonplace people as if they were of heroic stature.

In the *Battle of the Frogs and the Mice* we have a burlesque of the epic itself, but the mock-epic may be used for a different purpose. In *The Rape of the Lock*, probably the most successful poem of its kind ever written, Pope is not satirizing the type; instead, he is trying to allay ill feeling between the families of a certain Lord Petre and a Miss Arabella Fermor by ridiculing its cause—the fact that the lord had playfully snipped off a lock of the lady's hair. Presenting Miss Fermor as Belinda and treating Lord Petre's act as a thing of great importance, Pope created a poem which burlesques the epic manner to perfection. He even introduced the supernatural in the form of sylphs—imaginary creatures supposed to inhabit the air. His description of the snipping of the lock and of what followed illustrates his method. Calling the scissors a "mighty engine," he says:

Ev'n then, before the fatal engine closed,  
A wretched Sylph too fondly interposed;

<sup>16</sup> J. P. Mahaffy, *A History of Classical Greek Literature*. New York (Harper and Brothers), 1880, p. 90.



Fate urged the shears, and cut the Sylph in twain  
(But airy substance soon unites again).

The meeting points the sacred hair dis sever  
From the fair head, for ever, and for ever!

Then flash'd the living lightning from her eyes,  
And screams of horror rend th' affrighted skies.  
Not louder shrieks to pitying Heav'n are cast,  
When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last;  
Or when rich China vessels fall'n from high,  
In glittering dust and painted fragments lie!

A form often difficult to distinguish from the epic is that known as the metrical romance. Great numbers of such poems were current in Europe in the period between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Usually they differed from the epics in that they were shorter and nearly always written in stanzas. They had little plot, being composed of episodes strung together in series—episodes dealing with chivalric adventures, which are, as a rule, either motivated by love or in some way associated with it. Along with these adventures they frequently include all kinds of marvels and magic. Their pictures of knightly exploits are almost invariably idealized and conventional. Very little real characterization appears in them, their heroes and heroines being very much of a piece. A few of them, however, stand out as works of considerable literary importance. Among the best in English is *Gawain and the Green Knight*. These old romances, generally speaking, are of more historic than artistic interest, but they represent a type to which some of the best modern narrative poetry belongs. Such poems as Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes," Arnold's "The

Forsaken Merman," and Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* are metrical romances. Though they surpass the old romances in literary beauty and power, they have much of the same spirit.

When narrative poems come down to a less elevated plane, they are generally called rhymed tales. Between the metrical romance and the rhymed tale it is difficult to draw any sharp distinctions. The tale is, for the most part, simpler than the romance and more matter-of-fact. The romance is concerned chiefly with distinguished characters of high birth; the tale is more likely to deal with everyday people. The romance is inclined to treat of things at least slightly removed from the author in time and place; the tale tends to portray what is closer at hand, often with a touch of satiric humor. Examples of the rhymed tale abound in the works of George Crabbe. More familiar examples are Tennyson's "Enoch Arden," Kipling's "Gunga Din," and John Masefield's "Dauber." One of the greatest rhymed tales of all time is Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale," which retells an old story of a cock and a fox:

A poor widow has a cock, Chauntecleer, who in crowing has no equal in all the land. One night Chauntecleer dreams that he sees a terrifying beast in the barnyard. Waking, he tells his dream to Pertilote, his favorite hen. Pertilote, who seems to be of a practical turn of mind, tries to comfort him by attributing the dream to indigestion and suggests a course of treatment, saying of the herbs she prescribes:

Pekke hem up right as they growe and ete hem yn.

But Chauntecleer is skeptical. He retorts with an argument to prove that dreams have significance, citing authorities in a learned way. Next morning the dream comes true. A fox appears, seizes Chauntecleer, and makes off with him, a number of people pursuing. Chauntecleer, however, saves himself by his wits thus, as Chaucer tells it:

Lo, how Fortune turneth sodeynly  
 The hope and pryde eek of hir enemy!  
 This cock, that lay upon the foxes back,  
 In all his drede unto the fox he spak,  
 And seyde, "Sire, if that I were as ye,  
 Yet sholde I seyn, as wys God helpe me,  
     'Turneth agayne, ye proude cherles alle!  
 A verray pestilence upon yow falle!  
 Now am I come unto the wodes syde;  
 Maugree youre heed, the cok shal heere abyde,  
 I wol hym etc, in feith, and that anon!" "  
 The fox answerde, "In faith, it shal be don."  
 And as he spak that word, al sodeynly  
 The cok brak from his mouth delyverly,  
 And heighe upon a tree he fleigh anon.<sup>17</sup>

This delightful "Nun's Priest's Tale" contains nothing idealized or heroic. In making chickens dispute learnedly about dreams it purposely offers an impossible situation for the comic effect, but it does so in a serious, straightforward, matter-of-fact way, and its description of the poor widow and her barnyard is a realistic picture painted from contemporary life.

Another type which should be included under the head of narrative poetry is the dramatic monologue.

<sup>17</sup> From the *Cambridge Edition*, edited by Professor F. N. Robinson (Houghton Mifflin Company). This edition is recent and authoritative.

This type was mentioned by way of comparison when we were studying the dramatic lyric. As we observed at that time, the dramatic monologue presents a character who describes a crisis as if he were participating in the action all the time that he is telling us about it. This character also speaks in such a way as to suggest the participation of at least one other person in the scene, although the other person does not actually say anything. And finally the situation is so described that we seem to witness what is going on as if it were presented on a stage. Browning is, of course, the great master in the field of the dramatic monologue, but other writers have used the form successfully. Tennyson's "Ulysses," for example, and his "Oenone" belong to the same class. Of Browning's dramatic monologues "My Last Duchess" has already been mentioned. Another good example is his "Andrea del Sarto." In *The Ring and the Book*, a poem of more than twenty-one thousand lines, in which the same story is retold by different speakers or from different points of view twelve times, Browning gives us a series of such poems.

The ballad, the epic, the mock-epic, the metrical romance, and the rhymed tale are the chief types of narrative poetry. The pastoral, the allegory, descriptive poetry, satiric poetry, and didactic poetry, which may conveniently be included in this chapter, are frequently narrative, but really constitute separate types.

The *Idyls* of Theocritus, which appeared about 275 B.C., are the source of what we know as pastoral poetry, and of our conception of what the term *idyl* implies.

The word comes from a diminutive of the Greek *eidos*, which meant *form*. The term, therefore, may be taken

The Idyl. etymologically to mean *a little picture*.

Since a number of the poems which Theocritus called idyls dealt with humble rustic life, the idea arose that such poems are short descriptions featuring or, at least, suggesting landscape. But many of the idyls of Theocritus would not accord with such an idea. The famous No. 15, for instance, offers some clever dialogue between two rather sophisticated city ladies who are attending the festival held yearly in honor of Adonis. And when we come down to modern times, we see that Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* do not accord any better with the popular conception of the genre. They are idyls only in that they are separate pictures of life in and around King Arthur's court; but they do not deal primarily with humble people nor with rustic scenes. All in all, we must admit that the term *idyl* is so loosely and vaguely applied that it can hardly be said to designate a distinct literary type.

With the pastoral, however, the case is different. Some of the idyls of Theocritus which were concerned with country scenes gave little sketches of the life of

The Pastoral.

shepherds or "pastors." With these poems the sub-class in question comes into existence. The most polished examples of it are Virgil's *Eclogues* in which we see the subject introduced by Theocritus treated in a more finished and conventional manner. Alexander Pope describes the pastoral thus:

A Pastoral is an imitation of the action of a shepherd, or one considered under that character. The form of this imi-

tation is dramatic, or narrative, or mixed of both: the fable simple, the manners not too polite nor too rustic: the thoughts are plain, yet admit a little quickness and passion, but that short and flowering: the expression humble, yet as pure as the language will afford; neat, but not too florid; easy and yet lively. In short, the fable, manners, thoughts, and expressions are full of the greatest simplicity in nature.

This gives a very good idea of the general nature of pastoral poetry, but to understand fully Pope's conception of the type we must read what he says a little further on in his discussion:

If we would copy nature, it may be useful to take this idea along with us, that Pastoral is an image of what they call the golden age: so that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceived then to have been, when the best of men followed the employment.

Here Pope is describing the kind of pastoral which he himself practices, quite clearly in imitation of Virgil. Many pastorals follow this style; others, such as Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* and Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd*, give more realistic pictures of the rustic life of their times.<sup>18</sup>

Another type, of no little importance in English literature, is the allegory. An allegory sets forth a subject in the guise of some other subject which resembles it. An excellent illustration of this method is the old fable of the belly and the members, which Shakespeare brought into his *Coriolanus*. At a time of famine in Rome, if we may trust

The  
Allegory.

<sup>18</sup> When the pastoral takes the form of a dialogue between two shepherds, it is usually called an eclogue.

the tradition, grain was imported from Sicily, but the patrician, Coriolanus, advised that the people should not share in it unless they would agree that the offices filled by their tribunes should be abolished. In the opening scene of Shakespeare's play the people are in a state of revolt. Menenius Agrippa, a friend of Coriolanus's, enters and tells a fable which, with certain interrupting remarks omitted, is this:

There was a time when all the body's members  
 Rebell'd against the belly, thus accused it:  
 That only like a gulf it did remain  
 I' the midst o' the body, idle and inactive,  
 Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing  
 Like labour with the rest, where the other instruments  
 Did see and hear, devise, instruct, walk, feel,  
 And mutually participate, did minister  
 Unto the appetite and affection common  
 Of the whole body. The belly answered—

. . . . .  
 "True is it, my incorporate friends," quoth he,  
 "That I receive the general food at first  
 Which you do live upon; and fit it is,  
 Because I am the store-house and the shop  
 Of the whole body. But, if you do remember,  
 I send it through the rivers of your blood,  
 Even to the court, the heart, to the seat o' the brain;  
 And through the cranks and offices of man,  
 The strongest nerves and small inferior veins  
 From me receive that natural competency  
 Whereby they live. And though that all at once,  
 You, my good friends"—this says the belly, mark me,—  
 . . . "Though all at once cannot  
 See what I do deliver out to each,

Yet I can make my audit up, that all  
 From me do back receive the flour of all,  
 And leave me but the bran."

Thus speaks Menenius Agrippa in an allegory; and when one of the citizens asks how it is to be applied, he explains it as follows:

The senators of Rome are this good belly,  
 And you the mutinous members; for examine  
 Their counsels and their cares, digest things rightly  
 Touching the weal o' the common, you shall find  
 No public benefit which you receive  
 But it proceeds or comes from them to you  
 And no way from yourselves.

In having Menenius Agrippa recount this fable, Shakespeare, so to speak, incorporates a bit of narrative poetry into the drama. In narrative poetry proper, however, allegory, when it occurs, is likely to be much longer. Then the writer takes certain virtues, vices, or other abstractions, personifies them, and makes them characters in the story, which thus indirectly is made to tell another story almost necessarily didactic in nature. All this is exemplified in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the greatest and most complicated allegory in English poetry. When Spenser published the first three books of his poem in 1590, he prefixed a letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, in which he explained that the hero of the first book, the Redcrosse Knight, stood for holiness; the hero of the second, Sir Guyon, for temperance; and the heroine of the third, the Lady Britomarte, for chastity. Thus we see the allegorical method of personifying virtues clearly illustrated. And each of the stories in which



these characters appear suggests a parallel story. For instance, the Redcrosse Knight's victory over the dragon, as narrated in the first book of *The Faerie Queene*, suggests the victory of holiness over sin. Thus the essential allegory in the first book, to borrow the explanation given in a recent edition, is this:

The Redcrosse Knight represents man in the search for Holiness; his great task is the slaying of the dragon of sin which keeps mankind . . . in subjection.<sup>19</sup>

A simpler and more popular allegory, in prose, however, not verse, is *The Pilgrim's Progress* of Bunyan, which in vivid dramatic form personifies the trials and triumphs of the religious life.

In poetry of all kinds bits of incidental description are frequently to be found; but some poems are chiefly descriptive, and these may be grouped together to form what can be treated as a type. Of such poetry little need be said. It gives pictures of nature, with or without human denizens. If the poet works subjectively, mingling his own reflections with his description, his poem becomes a descriptive lyric; if, on the other hand, he works objectively, his description will produce the effect of narrative. "Tintern Abbey" is an illustration of the first kind. It portrays nature, but, at the same time, expresses the thoughts and feelings which the contemplation of nature arouses in the author. Similarly, *The Deserted Village* depicts life in an Irish hamlet as it was lived in Goldsmith's youth, and along with the descrip-

Descriptive  
Poetry.

<sup>19</sup> See *The Faerie Queene, Book I*, edited by Lilian Winstanley. Cambridge (The Cambridge University Press), 1928, Introduction VIII.

tion, gives the poet's thoughts concerning the changes which luxury and wealth have brought upon his "sweet Auburn."

Finally brief mention should be made of two types which are not difficult to characterize—satiric poetry and didactic poetry. A satiric poem is a poem which

Satiric  
Poetry. holds up individuals or groups of people to ridicule, or makes some political institution, way of life, or belief, or action appear ridic-

ulous. The two greatest verse satirists in English literature are Dryden and Pope, to whom perhaps should be added Byron in parts of *Don Juan*. A selection from *MacFlecknoe*, Dryden's personal attack upon the dramatist, Shadwell, has already been quoted, and reference has been made to Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, a mock-epic which exemplifies social rather than personal satire. Two other celebrated satires are Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* and Pope's *Dunciad*.<sup>20</sup> Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*, a mock-heroic poem once immensely popular, makes fun of the Puritans. Of its style the following passage, which has often been quoted but bears repetition, is a sample:

For his religion, it was fit  
To match his learning and his wit;  
'Twas Presbyterian true blue;  
For he was of that stubborn crew  
Of errant saints, whom all men grant  
To be the true Church Militant;  
Such as do build their faith upon  
The holy text of pike and gun;

<sup>20</sup> Examples of prose satire in English are Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and *Tale of a Tub*.

Decide all controversies by  
 Infallible artillery;  
 And prove their doctrine orthodox  
 By Apostolic blows and knocks . . .

Didactic poetry was mentioned in the chapter on the lyric. There we noted that lyrics may show a didactic vein. In general, however, the didactic note carries us pretty far from the lyric and is more closely allied to the narrative and the descriptive style. An English example of a poem which is primarily didactic is Pope's *Essay on Man*. Much poetry of this kind stands close to the borderland of prose for the simple reason that poetry is not the natural vehicle for teaching. When, however, the precepts are brought into intimate connection with those themes which can arouse deep universal emotions as is the case with certain passages in the *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius, the greatest of all didactic poems, we have a work which is at once didactic and poetical to the highest degree.

*We have seen that in narrative poetry there are four chief types; the ballad, which includes the ballad proper and the art-ballad; the epic, which includes the authentic epic and the art-epic, or secondary epic; the metrical romance, and the rhymed tale.*

Summary. *From our study of these types we have learned that ballads proper are songs which tell stories, are of unknown authorship, are perpetuated orally, are composed in stanzas, frequently with incremental repetition and refrain, are presented objectively, and usually deal with some subject likely to appeal to the imagination of the*

*folk; and that art-ballads are modern poems of known authorship which are works of conscious art but imitate the old ballads in form and spirit.*

*We have also learned that authentic epics are long poems by men who were in touch with the spirit of early civilizations—poems written objectively in lofty style and, for the most part, in uniform verse, reflecting racial customs, beliefs, and ideals, often having to do with the supernatural and the marvelous, and recounting the deeds of a national hero, or being at least nationalistic in tone; that the secondary epics, which are sometimes romantic, imitate more or less closely the structure and style of the true epics; and that the mock-epics either burlesque the true epics or treat some trivial subject in the epic form and the lofty epic style.*

*Furthermore, we have seen that the metrical romances are narrative poems usually shorter than epics, nearly always written in stanzas, dealing in most cases with love, frequently presenting the marvelous and the supernatural, and exhibiting heroes and heroines which impress us as idealized rather than real; and that rhymed tales are less complicated in plot than the romances and present realistic characters in a rather matter-of-fact style.*

*Again we have seen that in the dramatic monologue a crisis of some kind is described by a character as if he were taking part in it before our eyes and in such a way as to suggest the participation of a second person.*

*And finally, we have seen that there are other types which are often but not always narrative. Among these we have included the idyl, which is often descrip-*

*tive and suggestive of landscape, which is often spoken of as a type, but which in reality does not represent a distinct type at all. And we have likewise included the pastoral, which presents shepherds and shepherdesses in a rustic setting; the allegory, which sets forth a subject in the guise of some other subject that is related to it, often using personified abstractions for characters; descriptive poetry, which, as the name suggests, describes; satiric poetry, which holds up some person, belief, or institution to ridicule; and didactic poetry, which aims to convey information, often with a moral lesson attached.*

### QUESTIONS

1. What are the chief types of narrative poetry?
2. Into what two classes may ballads be divided?
3. Tell what you know about those which belong to the first class.
4. In what ways do those in the second class differ from those in the first?
5. Can you name examples of the first kind; of the second?
6. What are the sources of the authentic epic?
7. What are the typical traits of the authentic epic?
8. What can you say about the structure of the authentic epic, its use of the supernatural and the marvelous, its meter, its style?
9. What secondary epic imitates most closely the characteristics of the primary type?
10. In what respects does it differ from the models?
11. What qualities make *Paradise Lost* an epic?
12. What traits distinguish the romantic epics?
13. What is a mock-epic?
14. What is the greatest mock-epic in English?
15. What are the traits of the metrical romance?
16. How does the rhymed tale differ from the metrical romance?
17. How did the idyl originate?
18. Can it be called a distinct type?
19. What are the characteristics of the pastoral?
20. What is an allegory?
21. Why is Spenser's *Faerie Queene* called an allegory?

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22. What is descriptive poetry? 23. What is satiric poetry?

24. What is didactic poetry?

### EXERCISES

1. Of the epic James Joyce says this:

The simplest epical form is seen emerging out of lyrical literature when the artist prolongs, and broods upon himself as the center of the epical event and this form progresses till the center of emotional gravity is equidistant from the artist himself and from others. The narrative is no longer personal. The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea. This progress you will see easily in that old English ballad *Turpin Hero*, which begins in the first person and ends in the third.<sup>21</sup>

Explain this in your own words. Does this make you recall some of the things we have just been studying? What things?

2. Here are two pronouncements on long poems. Since long poems are usually narrative the arguments here set forth may be studied in connection with narrative poetry. Sum up the points on both sides and then state whether you prefer long poems or short ones, and why:

I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement. But all excitements are, through a psychal necessity, transient. That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be so called at all, cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags, fails, a revulsion ensues, and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York (Viking Press and B. W. Huebsch), 1925, p. 252.

<sup>22</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *The Poetic Principle*.

At any rate I have no right to talk until *Endymion* is finished—it will be a test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination and chiefly of my invention which is a rare thing indeed—by which I must make 4000 lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry; and when I consider that this is a great task, and that when done it will take me but a dozen paces towards the Temple of Fame—it makes me say—God forbid that I should be without such a task! I have heard Hunt say and [I] may be asked—why endeavour after a long Poem? To which I should answer—Do not the Lovers of Poetry like to have a little Region to wander in where they may pick and choose, and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading: which may be food for a week's stroll in the Summer? Do not they like this better than what they can read through before Mrs. Williams comes down stairs? A Morning's work at most. Besides a long Poem is a test of Invention which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder. Did our great Poets ever write short Pieces? I mean in the shape of Tales— This same invention seems indeed of late Years to have been forgotten as a Poetical excellence.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. M. B. Forman, New York (Oxford University Press), 1931, I, 55.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE DRAMA

OF the different poetic types the lyric, the narrative, and the dramatic are the most important. The first two we have already investigated. The third can best be included under a study of the drama in general, for dramatic poetry is usually identified with the drama as intended for acting.

Dramatic  
Poetry.

We also sometimes use the word *dramatic* with reference to poetry falling outside the drama yet exhibiting dramatic qualities; but the study of what is dramatic in such poetry likewise falls in with the study of the drama. In this chapter we shall consider some general aspects of the drama, postponing the study of plot, character, and setting until later.

It has been asserted that drama exists only when some kind of representation is taking place before an audience. Usage, however, permits us to apply the word *drama* to writings intended for oral interpretation by actors. And, indeed, though drama can exist without words and though the production of the spoken drama depends upon other things besides words—such things as scenery, costume, stage properties, and, most important of all, the movements of the actors—drama is often defined in terms of a written composition. The writings which can thus be called dramas do not necessarily have to be works of literature. Many plays which are highly successful in

Drama as  
Literature.



the theater have no literary value. But many, on the other hand, are of great literary importance, some of the world's greatest literature having taken the form of drama. Much drama, therefore, can be enjoyed not only when enacted on the stage, but also when read as literature. Recognizing this fact, modern playwrights usually print their plays in order that we may read them, and, in addition, often furnish detailed descriptions of the settings in order that we may have the pleasure of visualizing the plays as acted.<sup>1</sup> Since this book is a study of literature, we shall deal here primarily with the literary drama, or with the drama as literature.

The ordinary use of the word *dramatic* in daily life throws a good deal of light on the use of the word in literary criticism. Concerning the usually accepted idea of what this word connotes Professor Allardyce Nicoll writes as follows:

The  
Popular  
Idea of  
Drama.

We read in the papers of the "Dramatic Reunion of Two Brothers," and are told there of how two sons of one father have been separated for thirty years through some silly quarrel: as old men they find themselves unexpectedly in a small country hotel, speak to one another as strangers, discover each other's identity, and are reconciled at last. Every one is, of course, familiar with the frequent utilization of such headings in the daily journals, although seldom do we stay to consider the implication of the particular adjective or noun employed. If we do we shall find that, for the journalist, and so for the public to which he addresses himself, the word "dramatic" has a connotation signifying the unexpected, with, usually, a suggestion of a certain shock

<sup>1</sup> Some of the Restoration dramatists did the same thing.

## THE DRAMA

occasioned either by a strange coincidence or by the departure of the incidents narrated from the ordinary tenor of daily life. Now the very fact that this word "dramatic" can thus be freely and commonly used must indicate that in this strangeness, unexpectedness, and sense of shock the public recognizes something which it finds as a main element in works of dramatic art. For, be it noted, here is not a plain transference of meaning, but the direct use of a literary term for that which is found, even if but rarely, to resemble it in ordinary life.<sup>2</sup>

We then apply the term *dramatic* to certain exceptional situations in life because we have seen in drama a tendency to represent such situations rather than to portray the ordinary routine of the commonplace. Thus in the popular mind the drama has to do with things exceptional—with things strange, unexpected, and capable of producing a sense of shock.

When we think back over the plays we have read or seen acted, we find much justification for the popular conception of drama. But why should drama tend to deal with what is strange, unexpected, and likely to produce a feeling of shock? Certainly there is no inherent law of art which forbids the presentation of the commonplace on the stage. The answer seems to be that men and women take particular interest in those occurrences which are more striking than ordinary events. The exceptional things in life are peculiarly able to attract attention, and the fact that they arouse interest makes them, when enacted, especially fitted for drawing audiences. To be

The Appeal  
of the Ex-  
ceptional.

<sup>2</sup> Allardyce Nicoll, *The Theory of Drama*, New York (T. Y. Crowell and Company), p. 36.

successful in the theater, plays must appeal to more than a select few. To be produced successfully, they must interest the public at large; consequently the character of drama is, to a considerable extent, determined by the nature of popular interests. If we keep this fact in mind, we shall be better prepared to face the problems suggested by certain trends in modern dramatic theory.

Professor Donald Clive Stuart closes a chapter on the Russian drama, and, in particular, a discussion of Gorky's play *The Lower Depths*, with this statement, which seems to reflect the present attitude of some critics and many playwrights:

The Broadening Conception of Drama.

. . . Life is sometimes dramatic. Generally it is undramatic. Is the theatre to be closed to the presentation of life as it usually is? Is the dramatist to relinquish to the novelist the presentation of static situations and people who are not consciously manifesting their will? . . . There is nothing in dramatic art which forces it to relinquish to the novelist any portion of human life and truth. The fact that it may have done so is no proof that it must continue to do so. Drama is a representation of life by actors. There is no law, no limitation, save the limitations of the human beings who produce the representation.<sup>3</sup>

This implies a broadening of the ordinary conception of drama. It amounts to saying that the undramatic may be dramatic, which is about the same as saying that a lyric poem may not be lyrical and a narrative poem may not be narration. If life is usually undramatic and we open the theaters to life as it usually is, we shall be

<sup>3</sup> Donald Clive Stuart, *The Development of Dramatic Art*. New York (D. Appleton-Century Company), 1928, p. 614.

putting on the stage that which is undramatic in the popular sense of the word. Certainly in theory there is no valid reason for arbitrarily barring any aspect of life from the theater, but will undramatic plays be successful in attracting audiences? Here we have the old problem which, in all departments of literature, faces the extreme realist—the problem of making the commonplace interesting. It may possibly happen that dramatists of the future will write successful plays which will exhibit none of the features now considered dramatic, but the productions of the past and, to a great extent, those of the present conform more or less closely to the popular conception of drama. We are, thus, justified in feeling that the presentation of what is strange, unexpected, or capable of giving a sense of shock is largely characteristic of dramatic art.

One thing in which we are all likely to be interested is action; and when this assumes the quality of the dramatic, our interest is greatly augmented. It is, then, not surprising that action of some kind has long been considered an essential trait of drama. The very word *drama* means “doing,” or “something done.” Physical movement alone, however, is not drama. When a gymnast comes upon the stage and shows us some spectacular feat, we see action but not drama. And if, between the acts, a man in the audience should suddenly climb up over the footlights and before our eyes shoot himself through the head, we should witness action of a very dramatic kind; but it would not be drama. Action in the drama goes hand in hand with impersonation. The player in the theater acts in the character of somebody else. He

Action in  
Drama.

is not himself living life before us; he is impersonating some one else's living of life. Again, by action in the drama we usually mean movement from one separate action or group of actions to another, or from the display of one emotion to that of another, or we mean both. In short, we mean progressive movement—movement from situation to situation, which is ordinarily the equivalent of story.

Many primitive dramas present stories through mimicry unassisted by words; that is, through action alone. The pantomimes practiced today by such people as the Aleutian Islanders and the Australian blacks are of this kind. An elaborate Australian pantomime, which offers a good illustration of action in primitive drama, has thus been described:

The first scene consisted in the representation of a herd of cattle which came out of the woods to pasture on the meadow. The black players had painted themselves appropriately to their characters. The imitation was skillful; the motion and behavior of each head of the herd was amusingly natural. Some lay on the ground and chewed their cuds. Others stood and scratched themselves with their horns and their hind teet, or licked their companions or their calves. Others rubbed one another's heads in a friendly way. After their bucolic idyl had lasted a little while, the second scene began. A band of blacks were perceived creeping upon the herd with all the precautions which the natives use in such cases. At length they were near enough, and two cattle fell, struck by spears, to the highest delight of the spectators who broke out in enthusiastic applause. The hunters began to skin their prey, dress it, and cut it up—all with the most pains-

taking exactness. The third scene was opened with a trotting of horses in the wood. Immediately afterward a troop of white men appeared on horseback. Their faces were painted a whitish brown; their bodies blue or red, to represent colored shirts; and the lower parts of their legs, in the absence of gaiters, were wrapped in brushwood. These white men galloped straight up to the blacks, fired, and drove them back. The latter collected again, and a desperate battle began, in which the blacks beat the whites and drove them back. The whites bit off their cartridges, fixed the caps on their guns—in short, went regularly through all the motions of loading and firing. As often as a black fell the spectators groaned, but when a white man bit the dust a loud shout of joy went up. At last the whites were disgracefully put to flight, to the unbounded delight of the natives, who were so excited that the merest trifle might have changed the sham fight into bloody earnest.<sup>4</sup>

Here we have action not only in the sense of physical movement on the part of the players, but also in the sense of story movement—progress from situation to situation. And we should also note that since there is no dialogue, all of the simple story has to be presented before the eyes of the spectators.

The procedure of the Greek dramatists was different. They usually began their plays near the end of the story, bringing out the earlier events in a prologue or by hints in the dialogue. And even in what they actually presented on the stage there was less physical action than we are accustomed to see in plays like those of Shakespeare, let us say. The Greeks were to some extent limited by conventions aris-

Action  
in Greek  
Drama.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Ernest Grosse, *The Beginnings of Art*. New York (D. Appleton-Century Company), 1897, p. 268.

ing out of a religious tradition. For one thing, tradition had given them a chorus which brought a prominent lyrical element into their plays and made rapid development of the story extremely difficult. Before Aeschylus only the chorus and a single actor could appear on the stage at one time; consequently the story had to be presented chiefly through narration. Aeschylus brought in a second actor and reduced the proportion of lines allotted to the chorus. Later, a third actor was introduced and the importance of the chorus in the exposition of the plot was steadily lessened. All this shows that the Greek dramatists appreciated the dramatic value of action in the sense of plot movement. And the fact that the Greeks looked upon action, even in the sense of physical movement, as characteristic of drama is made clear by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, for he says:

These, then, as we said at the beginning, are the three differences which distinguish artistic imitation,—the medium, the objects, and the manner. So that from one point of view, Sophocles is an imitator of the same kind as Homer—for both imitate higher types of character; from another point of view, of the same kind as Aristophanes—for both imitate persons acting and doing. Hence, some say, the name of “drama” is given to such poems as representing action.<sup>5</sup>

In the majority of English plays, the story, or most of it, is represented before the eyes of the audience through action and dialogue. Such representation is the usual practice of Shakespeare. Of late years, however, there has been a marked tendency to reduce the

<sup>5</sup> From S. H. Butcher, *The Poetics of Aristotle*. London, 1911, p. 13. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

amount of physical movement. The Norwegian dramatist, Ibsen, whose influence has been widespread, reverted largely to the method of Greek tragedy, putting on the stage only the events which occur near the crisis of the story and disclosing what has preceded simply through dialogue. And more recently an attempt has been made to produce plays as nearly actionless as possible—plays with a minimum of physical movement and almost no story progression. For this Maurice Maeterlinck has been chiefly responsible. At one time he championed what has been called the "static" drama. He states his theory concerning this drama of passivity in the following oft-quoted words:

I have grown to believe that an old man, seated in his arm-chair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him; giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting, without comprehending, the silence of doors and windows and the quivering voice of the light, submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and his destiny—an old man, who conceives not that all the powers of this world, like so many heedful servants, are mingling and keeping vigil in his room, who suspects not that the very sun itself is supporting in space the little table against which he leans, or that every star in heaven and every fibre of the soul are directly concerned in the movement of an eyelid that closes, or a thought that springs to birth—I have grown to believe that he, motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or "the husband who avenges his honor."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Treasure of the Humble*, translated by Alfred Sutro. New York (Dodd, Mead and Company), p. 121.



In the calm and silence of scenes like the one just described Maeterlinck found qualities of drama; and applying his theory in *The Intruder*, he produced a play which is almost actionless. There is no story movement and very little physical movement. Through the use of symbolism, nevertheless, Maeterlinck effects the illusion of the coming of death. We hear, for instance, a gardener whetting his scythe off stage; we see a candle burn low and then go out; and we see a nun make the sign of the cross. The total result is not the revelation of a story but the creation of an impression. The play is dramatic probably because the coming of death contains in itself something of suspense, and strangeness, and shock. But whether a static drama which aims simply at creating an emotional impression can ever supplant the familiar drama of action, which conveys a story, remains to be seen. In any case, it is significant that Maeterlinck, who gave impetus to the modern experimenting in passive drama, has himself changed his mind. In his later plays, such as *Monna Vanna*, he returns to the drama of action, and in his essay "The Modern Drama" he makes this illuminating pronouncement:

It is legitimate, and easy for the thinker, the moralist, historian, novelist, even for the lyric poet, to open up new ground in the consciousness of man; but at no price whatever may the dramatic poet be an inactive observer or philosopher. Do what we will, and whatever the marvels we may some day imagine, it is always *action* that will be the sovereign law, the essential demand of the theatre. It would seem as though the rise of the curtain brought about a sudden transformation in the lofty intellectual thought we bring

with us; as though the thinker, psychologist, mystic, or moralist in us makes way for the mere instinctive spectator, who wants to "see something happen." This transformation or substitution is incontestable, however strange it may seem, and is due perhaps to the influence of the crowd, to an inherent faculty of the human soul, that appears to possess a special sense, primitive and scarcely susceptible of improvement, by virtue of which men think, and enjoy, and feel *en masse*. And there are no words so admirable, profound, and noble but they will soon weary us if they leave the situation unchanged, if they lead to no action, bring about no decisive conflict, or hasten no definite solution.<sup>7</sup>

Thus Maeterlinck, once a proponent of the static drama, now sums up the case for action. Little remains to be said. The future may conceivably bring an entirely new conception of dramatic art; but it is certainly true that action of some kind is still looked upon as a typical characteristic of drama and that plays without story movement—plays which aim solely at creating impressions—are still very much in the minority.

Another thing which has long been held essential is conflict. Ferdinand Brunetière actually defined drama in terms of conflict thus:

Drama is a representation of the will of man in conflict with the mysterious powers of natural forces which limit and belittle us; it is one of us thrown living upon the stage, there to struggle against fatality, against social law, against one of his fellow-mortals, against himself, if need be, against the ambitions, the inter-

<sup>7</sup> Translation by Alfred Sutro. See *The Cornhill Magazine*, New Series, Vol. VII (Aug. 1899), p. 170. See also Montrose J. Moses, *Maurice Maeterlinck* New York (Duffield & Company), 1911, p. 119.

ests, the prejudices, the folly, the malevolence of those who surround him.<sup>8</sup>

Brunetière's "law of the drama" has been strongly attacked and stoutly defended. Doubtless it goes somewhat too far; doubtless plays can be cited which exhibit little conflict, if any. Nevertheless, we must admit that in the greatest drama conflict in some form is almost invariably present. The truth is that here again we see the character of drama determined by popular interests. Conflict, though it may not be inherently necessary, is a thing which in real life always stirs our interest and a thing from which dramatic situations constantly arise. For these reasons it is inevitable that conflict should be an important element in the representation of life on the stage. The conflict which we find in drama shows either man's struggle against forces outside himself (outer struggle), or his struggle against forces within himself (inner struggle), or, as is often the case, shows both kinds of struggle in the same play.

A typical form of outer struggle is that in which there is a violent opposition of two wills. An excellent example of this is offered us by Aeschylus near the close of his *Prometheus Bound*. Having stolen fire from the gods and taught its use to men, Prometheus has incurred the anger of Zeus, who has had him chained to a rock,

<sup>8</sup> It was published in final form in 1894, in a preface entitled *The Law of the Drama (Loi du théâtre)*. It is here translated from Brunetière's *Etudes Critiques*, VII, 207, by William Archer. See William Archer, *Play-Making*. New York (Dodd, Mead and Company), 1928, p. 28. See also Ferdinand Brunetière's "The Law of the Drama," *Publications of the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University*, No. III (1914).

For an attack on Brunetière's theory, see William Archer, *Play-Making*, p. 28; and for a criticism of Archer's position, see Thomas Dwight Goodell, *Athenian Tragedy*, New Haven, 1920, pp. 121 ff.

there to suffer in helplessness while vultures gnaw at his vitals. But Prometheus knows of a destined marriage from which Heracles, who is to destroy the vultures and set him free, will be born. **Outer Conflict.** Hermes, the messenger of the gods, descends to the spot where Prometheus is chained and seeks to extract from him the secret of the marriage. The dialogue which follows reveals a violent conflict of wills.

Only part of *Prometheus Bound* is taken up with this conflict between the will of Prometheus and the will of Hermes, who is, of course, merely the agent of Zeus. Sometimes, however, a direct opposition of wills runs through an entire play. In Goldsmith's comedy *She Stoops to Conquer*, there is, from beginning to end, a mild conflict between the will of Mrs. Hardcastle, who is bent upon bringing about a marriage between her son, Tony, and Miss Neville, and the combined wills of those two young people, who are absolutely determined not to marry each other. In *The Taming of the Shrew* Shakespeare offers us an example of prolonged opposition of a more stubborn kind, Petruchio being determined to overcome the will of his Kate. And in Galsworthy's *Strife*, to mention a more recent play, the struggle between opposing wills is equally sustained and conspicuous. *Strife* deals with the conflict between labor and capital. Roberts is the leader of the workmen regularly employed by the Trenartha Tin Plate Works, but now on strike; Anthony is the chairman of the company's board of directors. Each is blindly determined to win at any cost. Both the men and the direc-

tors are ready to accept compromise, but neither Roberts nor Anthony is willing to yield on any point. The play is fundamentally a struggle between the uncompromising will of Roberts and the equally uncompromising will of Anthony. It ends in stalemate when both of these leaders are overridden.

Brander Matthews has said of Brunetière that "he subordinates the idea of struggle to the idea of volition," and perhaps it is this emphasis upon will which has made many feel that Brunetière's law of the drama, if we wish to call it a law, cannot be applied universally. In any case, it is certainly true that often, though the will of a leading character in a play is clearly operative, our attention is attracted not so much to his volitional activity as to the struggle itself. In Pinero's *His House in Order* we see Nina, the heroine, struggling against an adverse environment. Her real antagonist, of course, is the memory of her husband's first wife, Annabel, and her active opponents are Annabel's living relatives, against whom she does at times exercise her will so conspicuously that we are made definitely conscious of active volition. Our attention is fixed chiefly, nevertheless, upon her struggle against an unhappy environment rather than upon any determination on her part to beat down an opposing will. And in *Romeo and Juliet*, although both of the lovers are obviously resolved to fly in the face of the opposition to their marriage, our attention is drawn not to their volitional activity but to the struggle which results from it.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes we can recognize no active struggle but are conscious of a fatal antagonism. In the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, to mention a particular case, the hero does not struggle. We see the antagonism of a pitiless will in *Agamemnon's*

Of great importance, particularly in modern drama, is inner struggle—the struggle which takes place in a person's mind when he is torn between conflicting duties, or passions, or tendencies in his own nature. Contest of this kind may be found now and then in comedy. In Shylock's "My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!" there is, as Professor Nicoll has pointed out, something laughable, partly "because of the incongruity of the objects, and partly because of the inner struggle which they reveal." And in Sheridan's comedy *The Rivals*, the words of Falkland frequently disclose with comic effect an inner conflict between his jealousy and his love for Julia. But inner struggle by its very nature is almost inevitably serious. Very rarely does it impress us as comic, and for that reason instances of its presence in comedy are rare. The opposition in comedy is usually an outer conflict between incompatible personalities, between man and woman, or between an individual and society. In Greek tragedy the exhibition of inner struggle is equally rare; yet we do find traces of it. We find it strongly suggested, for example, in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, when King Theseus faces his illegitimate son, Hippolytus, and accuses him of being responsible for the queen's suicide. Hippolytus is innocent, but he cannot clear himself without violating an oath. The words which he addresses to the king forcefully suggest the violent battle taking place in his mind as he tries to decide whether to break his oath or suffer banishment

wife, Clytemnestra, who is bent upon her husband's destruction; but we feel no clash of wills, for Agamemnon is unaware of the doom which is awaiting him. He and Clytemnestra stand in a relation not of struggle but of fatal juxtaposition.

under his father's terrible curse. In all this is it to be remembered that Euripides departs from the older classical models and shows strong modern tendencies.<sup>10</sup>

Though the revelation of inner conflict is rare both in comedy and in Greek tragedy, it is notably prominent in the tragedies of Shakespeare, where it usually runs parallel to some form of outer struggle. We see Macbeth pitted in outer conflict against both the evil influence of Lady Macbeth and against fate, we may say, as personified by the witches; but, at the same time, we see that a desperate contest is being waged within his own mind. After the thought of murder has been suggested to him by the prophecies of the witches, he speaks thus in an aside:

This supernatural soliciting  
Cannot be ill, cannot be good: If ill,  
Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:  
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
Against the use of nature? Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings.  
My thought whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man that function  
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is  
But what is not.

<sup>10</sup> The conditions of the Greek theater militated against the portrayal of inner struggle. The use of changing facial expression to reveal what was happening in the mind of a character was made valueless because Greek tragedies were performed in great amphitheaters and the actors were thus removed to a considerable distance from the spectators. Besides, the players wore masks which prevented mobility of expression and helped to give the Greek drama a "statuesque" character.

Then Banquo calls our attention indirectly to Macbeth's mental struggle by saying, "Look how our partner's rapt." Meanwhile Macbeth continues and shows us that for the time being he has decided to thrust the horrible thought away. He says:

If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me  
Without my stir.

But the conflict has not ended. It reaches a crisis when after numerous vacillations of purpose, Macbeth leaves his guests at the banquet and delivers this soliloquy:

If 'twere done when 't is done, then 't were well  
It were done quickly: if the assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch  
With his surcease success; that but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,  
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases  
We still have judgment here; that we but teach  
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
To plague the inventor: This even-handed justice  
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice  
To our own lips. He's here in double trust:  
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,  
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,  
Who should against his murderer shut the door,  
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan  
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off;  
And pity, like a naked new-born babe  
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, hors'd



Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
 Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
 That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur  
 To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
 Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself  
 And falls on the other.

Here Macbeth, thinking aloud in a soliloquy, argues with himself against murdering Duncan; and although he finally yields because of his wife's evil influence and the weakness of his own nature, his mental agony is here intense. In *Hamlet*, to give one more illustration from Shakespeare, the inner conflict is of even greater prominence. Hamlet contends outwardly against Claudius, against Polonius, and against Laertes; but all these contests are as nothing compared with the strife waged within his own soul. The celebrated soliloquy about suicide results directly from Hamlet's inner turmoil, and his will is torn by the forces which urge him in opposite directions. Not until near the end of the play does he reach a decision, and then his action is precipitated not so much by definite volition as by accidental circumstances.

In more recent drama the portrayal of inner struggle is constantly emphasized. Of the illustrations which can be found on every hand a few will suffice. Ibsen's *The Master Builder* shows us in Halvard Solness a character whose mind is in a turmoil. His duty to his wife conflicts with his ambition to succeed in his work, he is continually fighting against his fear of the younger generation, and he suffers from an attitude of revolt against the Almighty. In Pinero's *His House in Order*, sharp

Inner  
 Conflict  
 in Recent  
 Drama.

conflicts progress within the mind of the heroine, Nina. She obtains evidence which reveals the true character of her husband's first wife, and wrestles with the temptation to disclose it. Again, she struggles to decide whether she shall attend the ceremonies of dedication when her husband gives a park to the community as a memorial to the first wife. Near the beginning of Drinkwater's *Robert E. Lee* we find inner conflict. Lee is offered the command of all the Union armies in the field. He is torn between loyalty to the flag under which he has served for years and loyalty to his native state. Shall he accept the offer, or resign his commission and join the forces of the South? And Maeterlinck's little play *Interior* is built almost entirely round an old man's struggle against his aversion to performing a disagreeable duty—that of announcing to a father and a mother the news that one of their daughters has been drowned. These examples illustrate inner struggle as it frequently appears in modern drama, but some contemporary dramatists carry this method even further and attempt to portray conflict between the subconscious mind and the conscious. In *The Great God Brown*, for instance, Eugene O'Neill has his characters reveal conflict between their conscious and subconscious personalities by alternately wearing and removing masks. All this raises the query whether the ancient objective method or the modern subjective method is the more essentially dramatic.

When we are thinking of the theater, we may, perhaps, say that the word *drama*, in its most comprehensive meaning, denotes simply the representing of life by impersonation before an audience. This conception of

the drama is broad enough to include plays practically devoid of both action and struggle. We can, however, describe the vast majority of theatrical productions—those in which action and struggle are both present—with greater definiteness if we say that drama portrays life by presenting through action and impersonation a

**A Working Conception of Drama.** story in which some kind of struggle occurs. And when we are thinking of literature, we can say that the word *drama* stands for the body of writings which are intended for interpretation by actors. A work of dramatic literature, then, will, in order to meet the usual requirements of the theater, present a story in which characters such as can be impersonated by actors “do things,” as Aristotle would say, and in which struggle of some kind is set forth. Besides, there is another important consideration. In order that a work of literature may be capable of interpretation on the stage by actors, it must take the form of dialogue.

The writing of good dramatic dialogue is a difficult art. In the first place, even though the dramatist may wish his play, in its total effect, to be an expression of his personal views, he should at least make his lines seem to voice the sentiments of the characters, not his own. If he does not, the characters will be mere mouthpieces and the play will strike the audience as artificial. The importance of meeting this fundamental requirement of good dramatic art is clearly explained by Professor Baker. In commenting upon modern problem plays, he says:

The thesis play or the problem play, which have been so current in the last few years, have brought into special

prominence a common fault in so-called dramatic dialogue. The speeches narrate, describe, expound or argue well, but not in the character of the supposed speaker. Rather the author himself is speaking. Such dialogue, whether it be as clever as some in Mr. Shaw's plays, as beautiful as certain passages in George Chapman, or as commonplace as in many modern instances, should be rewritten till the author can state the desired idea or facts as the imagined speaker would have stated them.<sup>11</sup>

In the second place, the dramatist must usually give us dialogue more consistently brilliant than the ordinary speech of real life. Efforts to bring upon the stage the language of actual everyday conversations are never likely to meet with much success. To say this is merely to extend the universal law of literature which demands some heightening of ordinary life. Such heightening brings us to the question of the particular use of illusion in drama.

The minute we enter a theater, we come under the spell of stage-illusion, and "the true stage-illusion," to use the words of Coleridge, "consists—not in the mind's

judging it to be a forest, but in its remission of the judgment that it is not a forest."

We accept, then, the make-believe world of the theater, but we know all the time that it is a make-believe world, not the real. And in this atmosphere of the theater we are inclined not only to expect but even to demand dialogue characterized by a more sustained cleverness than the ordinary conversation of even the wittiest men and women is likely to exhibit. It is clear

<sup>11</sup> G. P. Baker, *Dramatic Technique*. Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1919, p. 334.

that the dramatist Congreve fully understood this attitude of the usual audience, for he said:

I believe if a poet should steal a dialogue of any length, from the extempore discourse of the two wittiest men upon earth, he would find the scene but coldly received by the town.<sup>12</sup>

So in modern times we see that Mr. Shaw's plays, though they are frequently lacking in both action and the exhibition of struggle, hold the interest of audiences because they are full of remarkably clever dialogue.<sup>13</sup>

Most of the characteristics which we have noted as conspicuous in plays are to be found also in novels. The fact that we speak of certain novels as "dramatic"

The Drama and the Novel. proves that in them we recognize traits similar to those of the drama. How then do plays differ from novels? Arnold Bennett suggests that there is but one technical difference—"the fact that in the play the story is told by means of dialogue."<sup>14</sup> He quite properly qualifies his statement by adding that "a novel may consist exclusively of dialogue" and that "plays contain other matter than dia-

<sup>12</sup> See B. H. Clark, *European Theories of the Drama*. New York (D. Appleton-Century Company), 213 ff.

<sup>13</sup> In meeting the demand for brilliant and interesting stage talk, the dramatist runs the risk of writing dialogue which is out of character. He is in danger of making ordinary people speak so brilliantly as to destroy the illusion of naturalness. Even Shakespeare has been accused of doing this. It has been said that his stage children talk like adults. In his defense we may reply that the stage child is expected to say more clever things in five minutes than a child in real life would say in five months. And we notice the exaggerated brilliance of such characters much more when we read plays than when we see them in the theater, where we are under the influence of stage-illusion. The successful dramatist must know just how far to trust the power of the theater.

<sup>14</sup> *Metropolitan*, July, 1913. Quoted in Cunliffe and Lomer, *Writings of Today*, New York, 1923, p. 311.

logue." To these qualifications, however, we should not give too much weight; for, in most cases, the proportion of dialogue is very much greater in plays than in novels. We can agree, therefore, that the preponderant use of dialogue in the drama does, to a certain extent, set works of dramatic literature apart from all novels. It may be that what Arnold Bennett has noted does constitute the sole technical difference between the play and the novel, but certainly there are other differences, though they may not be technical. Of these we need mention only a few.

For one thing, we can devote as much time as we please to the reading of a novel, picking it up and putting it down at will; because we almost always read novels individually. We cannot, however, have a play stopped and resumed for us to suit our personal convenience; for in the theater we are merely individuals in an audience of others. Experience has proved that audiences as a rule cannot conveniently and with unflagging interest devote more than three hours to attending the performance of a play, and for that reason most plays are restricted in length. Accordingly, when plays are printed to be read, we usually find them much shorter than novels. Since plays are thus shorter, the playwright must deal with his materials selectively if he wishes to cover anything like the same amount of ground as the novelist would cover. The importance of skillful selection is well illustrated by Drinkwater's history play *Abraham Lincoln*. Drinkwater's problem was to characterize Lincoln against the background of the Civil War. Having space to represent but little of what happened between the fall of Fort Sumter and

the surrender at Appomattox, he was forced to select with care what would best suit his chief purpose—that of portraying Lincoln's nobility of character—and to omit much that a novelist would have included. This omitting of everything not absolutely essential is, in general, characteristic of the drama. It gives to plays a compression which sharply distinguishes them from most works of fiction. In the short story, indeed, there may be great compression, but this is usually achieved by curtailing the dialogue which is essential to drama. Again, a play cannot give directly the analysis, explanations, and comments in the mind of the author, but a novel can present page after page of such material. The ability to stop and comment at will offers at least one great advantage to the novelist. He can tell us just what is passing through the minds of his characters. He need not resort to awkward devices like the soliloquy and the aside, nor need he depend solely upon the dialogue to show us what his hero is thinking. He can seat the hero in a comfortable chair, or otherwise temporarily dispose of him, and then reveal to us directly what that man is dreaming, scheming, hoping, or fearing, as the case may be. And still again, plays differ from novels in that they cannot so easily suggest the passage of time. This difference we can best illustrate by quoting once more from Professor Baker, who says:

The novelist, in a few lines, tells us of many happenings in a considerable space of time, or writes: "Thus, in idle talk, a full hour passed," and we do not query the supposed passage of time. On the stage, however, when one gossip says to another: "I must be off. I meant to stop a minute, and I have gossiped an hour," auditors who recognize perfectly

that the two people have not talked ten minutes are likely to laugh derisively.<sup>15</sup>

In the drama, as in other departments of literature, we find types, and these are no less difficult to define than those in the branches of literature we have already studied. Of late years there has been so much merging of the conventional forms of drama that classification of modern dramatic writings according to the conventional types is often impossible. For that reason there is a tendency nowadays to speak of contemporary dramas simply as plays. However, the student of literature cannot afford to ignore the classifications which have had so much importance in the past. Without some knowledge of them we cannot fully appreciate the older plays; and, despite the mixing of types, they will almost certainly be applicable in many cases to plays of the future. The chief kinds of drama are tragedy, comedy, tragi-comedy, melodrama and farce. Of these the first two are the most important. Tragi-comedy, as the name suggests, presents a combination of tragedy with comedy; melodrama is related to tragedy; and farce is akin to comedy.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> G. P. Baker, *Dramatic Technique*. Boston, New York, and Chicago (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1919, p. 132.

<sup>16</sup> Dramatic productions such as miracle plays, moralities, masques, and chronicle plays, may, perhaps, be thought of as types, though in most cases they can be included in some one of the major categories which we are about to study. In English literature miracle plays were religious dramas, usually dramatized Bible stories. Moralities were dramatized allegories, the most famous example being *Everyman*. Masques were somewhat like pageants. They had little plot and depended for their effects largely upon music, dancing, and elaborate costuming. They usually presented some moral, and they were often written for special occasions. The most familiar play of this kind is Milton's *Comus*. Chronicle plays are plays based upon history.



The word *tragedy* has an interesting origin. It comes from the Greek *tragoedia*, which meant *goat song*. The customary explanation of its meaning is that Greek drama originated in the dithyramb, a wild, improvisational dancing and singing with which a chorus of men dressed to resemble goat-like satyrs celebrated the birth of the god Dionysus, and that the name *goat song*, after being first applied to the vocal music rendered by this chorus, became attached to the type of drama familiar to us as tragedy.<sup>17</sup> To this theory there is at least one objection. The dithyramb was joyous, and tragedy is not; thus the dithyramb could naturally have given rise to comedy, but not so easily to tragic plays. The difficulty may, perhaps, be resolved on the grounds that the name *goat song*, by confusion, became transferred to the solemn music sung in honor of dead heroes. There can be no doubt that in early times memorial ceremonies were performed at the tombs of men who were accounted heroes, and it seems that a chorus participated in these ceremonies. Herodotus tells us, for instance, that the Sicyonians were accustomed to honor their king, Adrastus, in this way, and his comments suggest that there was an interchange or confusion of some kind in the assigning of choruses to Adrastus and Dionysus.

<sup>17</sup> Some authorities contend that the expression *goat song* was used with reference to tragedy because the prize awarded to the tragic dramatist who was successful in competitions was sometimes a goat. See Roy C. Flickinger, *The Greek Theatre and Its Drama*, Chicago, 1918, p. 13.

Some scholars suggest that since Dionysus was a god of vegetation and the dithyramb can be interpreted as celebrating the rebirth of vegetation in spring, the satyr-chorus may also have been used in serious rites associated with the death of Dionysus; that is, with the death of vegetation in the late autumn.

In the *Poetics* Aristotle stated his conception of tragedy in this famous definition:

Tragedy . . . is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of the emotions. By "language embellished," I mean language into which rhythm, "harmony," and song enter. By "the several kinds in separate parts," I mean, that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others with the aid of song.<sup>18</sup>

This statement cannot be accepted in its entirety as a universal definition of tragic drama. Aristotle was writing with his eyes open to the practice of the Greek theater. Since Greek tragedies were composed partly of verse which was recited and partly of verse which was sung by the chorus, the requirements that the "several kinds" of embellishment be distributed appropriately in "separate parts" was applicable. We might say that it would also apply in the case of Shakespearean tragedies, which often contain passages in prose, though they are written chiefly in verse. For modern tragedies, however, such a requirement would have less importance, because modern tragic plays are usually written in prose throughout. Again, Aristotle speaks of the "purgation of the emotions" by pity and fear. Here the question of terminology arises. The problem of what is meant by

<sup>18</sup> From S. H. Butcher, *The Poetics of Aristotle*. London, 1911, p. 23. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

"purgation" we pass over as too far removed from our present theme.<sup>19</sup> Undoubtedly in the modern drama we see plays which contain only the first elements of Aristotle's definition, but it may be a question whether these should be called tragedies in the strict sense of the word. They approach tragedy in their seriousness and their magnitude, but by their omission of the elements of fear and pity they would seem to miss what has at least hitherto been regarded as the essential tragic note.

In the *Poetics* Aristotle also states that the chief characters in tragedy are "highly renowned and prosperous," while the people represented in comedy are "inferior."

In the case of the Greek plays with which  
 The Rank of the Hero. Aristotle was familiar this rule was generally valid. Certainly the Greek tragedies which have come down to us have to do mostly with the misfortunes of kings and other persons of high rank rather than with the tribulations of ordinary mortals.<sup>20</sup> But it cannot be said that this distinction holds entirely true for all drama. Shakespeare's tragic heroes and heroines are, to be sure, either men and women of royal rank like Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Hamlet, and Lear,

<sup>19</sup> Those who are interested may be referred to Butcher's comment on the *Poetics*.

<sup>20</sup> In the days when kings wielded great power, their presence as heroes in tragedies must have given the effect of universality, for the fortunes of many people would be more or less connected with the fortunes of the monarch. Similarly the introduction of the supernatural into plays would give them an air of universality. Professor Nicoll has suggested that the prevalence of dictatorships in recent times may become reflected in the drama and produce an illusion of universality similar to that produced by the kings in the Greek drama and in Shakespeare. On the whole, however, the dramatist of today cannot rely much on kings or on the supernatural. He must rely on the presentation of universal emotions and on connecting the individuals among his characters with enduring human ties.

or people of high station like Brutus, Coriolanus, Romeo, and Juliet; and his Richard II says:

For God's sake let us sit upon the ground,  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.

But Shakespeare's tragedies cannot always be distinguished from his comedies by the rank of the leading characters. In his low-comedy scenes we are introduced to "inferior" people; but when we view the comedies as a whole, particularly those of the romantic type, we find royalty and the nobility well represented. In *The Tempest* Prospero is a Duke, though he is in exile, and Ferdinand is the son of a king; in *As You Like It* we meet with dukes, daughters of dukes, lords and knights; and in *Twelfth Night* we find people of similar station. Thus for the plays of Shakespeare Aristotle's distinction does not fully hold true. And when we come to modern tragic plays, we find the leading roles usually assigned to ordinary persons rather than to kings and nobles. For example, Ibsen's tragic heroes and heroines—Halvard Solness, Hedda Gabler, and the rest—are people of the middle class.

In the vast majority of tragedies the hero is defeated by the forces which oppose him, while in comedies he is nearly always victorious in his struggle. In Shakespearean tragedy the protagonists suffer defeat and also meet death. When plays end thus unhappily with the defeat of the leading character or characters, we can safely classify them as tragedies; but we cannot assert that the vanquishing of the hero is an essential characteristic of all tragedy. In the category of the tragic drama, even in Greek, we

**The Ending  
in Tragedy.**

find plays in which the hero is not overcome. *The Eumenides* of Aeschylus, the concluding play in the great trilogy, is serious in tone and presents suffering; yet it ends happily, Orestes being at last reconciled with the Furies. And, if we turn to two modern plays which we have already noted, *The Intruder* and *Interior*, both by Maeterlinck, we find no defeat. In the first place there is no struggle and there is no protagonist to be overthrown. In the second the hero struggles inwardly against his aversion to carrying bad news. Finally, however, he masters his aversion and performs his unpleasant duty. Thus we may assert that he succeeds in his struggle.

We may then say that tragedy is in general serious, dark, and sad, and that it usually shows us men and women—often persons of high rank—struggling against forces which, in the end, may or may not prove too strong for them. Of great tragedy we can assert something more. It must always produce in us a peculiar feeling of elevation mixed with awe. When we see human passions, fanned to their hottest, represented on the stage, and when we behold the hero contending against tremendous forces which men can seldom fully understand or successfully resist, we are lifted in spirit to a plane far above the trivialities of ordinary life. We feel that in man there is something superior to the tempest of passions and the calamity of circumstance in which he may be involved. Even when he is broken at the end, as he generally is in true tragedy, there is that which Milton described in his great line: "And what is else not to be overcome."

The sense of elevation thus aroused may be enhanced

by the very language of the play. And since the style of poetry is generally stronger in emotional appeal than that of prose, it is not strange that those tragedies which one regards as supreme are generally in verse. It is significant that the parts of a play which from the point of view of drama impress us as the most intensely tragic frequently coincide with the play's most poetic passages. Nothing in *Macbeth* is more tragic than the hero-villain's reception of the news that his wife is dead. And in the lines which he addresses to Seyton—lines that seem to bespeak the atrophy of his affection for his faithful partner in crime—poetry surges to a height which elsewhere it has seldom attained:

She should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more; it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

The opposite of tragedy is, of course, comedy. Both the origin and the general character of this latter type are suggested by its name; for the Greek original of the Comedy. word *comedy* was formed by the combination of a word meaning "revelry" and a word meaning "song," and the ability to cause merriment typical of those plays which the Greeks designated

by this title has ever since continued to be the characteristic note of comedy.

Comedy excites our mirth in many different ways. Sometimes the mere physical appearance of a character impels us to laugh. Of this fact Shakespeare took full advantage. The low-comedy scenes in his *Henry IV, Part I* offer two excellent illustrations. Falstaff artfully makes capital of Bardolph's great red nose, thus fixing the attention of the audience upon a face the mere sight of which would call forth laughter; and Falstaff's own ungainly, obese figure is made doubly laughable by contrast every time it is exhibited alongside the tall gaunt form of Prince Hal. Again, the spectacle of characters placed in ludicrous and embarrassing positions appeals strongly to our sense of humor. The case of young Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer* is typical. Goldsmith, imitating an actual experience of his own, has Hastings and young Marlow mistake Mr. Hardcastle's house for an inn. Hastings soon finds out that he and his friend have been tricked; but young Marlow remains deceived almost to the end, and the ludicrous situations which result are responsible for much of the fun in the play. Still again, the appeal of comedy may be derived to a greater or less degree from the characterization of the people who appear in the story. Characters delight us if they are eccentric or if they exhibit in exaggerated form the traits of some type familiar to us in real life. The great popularity of Sheridan's play *The Rivals* has resulted largely from Mrs. Malaprop's misuse of big words. We are amused by this remarkable lady chiefly because she is an eccentric individual. Doubtless there are people like her in

the real world, but she is not so typical of a prominent social type as, let us say, Shakespeare's Justice Shallow. When we behold Shallow in action, we see a caricature of the English country squire of Shakespeare's day, and we indulge in merriment not only at the expense of Shallow, an individual, but also at the expense of a recognized social type. And mention should be made of one more source of entertainment in comedy. Witty dialogue in itself has the power to arouse mirth. Among modern plays comic effect of this kind is perhaps best exemplified in the comedies of Mr. Shaw.

When a comedy presents a definite hero participating in a struggle of some kind, that hero will either be victorious or in some way reconciled to defeat, if he is defeated. In *The Taming of the Shrew* Shakespeare gives us a typical combat between opposing wills. Petruchio finally succeeds in conquering the will of Kate; but though Kate is vanquished, there is nothing tragic about her defeat. Once defeated, she is entirely reconciled to the situation, and the play ends happily for all concerned. The happy ending is a characteristic typical of comedy. Dante even went so far as to call his great poem *The Divine Comedy*, because its ending is happy. However, the appropriateness of the title is open to question, for the poem is consistently serious. Indeed the mere fact that a poem ends happily is not sufficient proof that it belongs to the comic drama, for, as we have already seen, the same kind of ending may sometimes be found in tragedy. To be a true comedy a play must not only have a happy ending, but throughout must avoid the darker passions and fatalities of life.

The Ending  
in Comedy.



Often in modern tragedy we find not only occasional traces of comedy, but even whole scenes which are comic. In *Macbeth* we have the Knocking-at-the-Gate scene and in *Hamlet* the Gravediggers' scene. In such cases the humor may be hard and grim and thus accord well with the general effect of tragedy, or it may be inserted in order to relieve for a moment the emotional intensity of the spectator. It is often argued that by this relief the intensity of the drama as a whole is increased, but this we may say in passing is a very questionable theory. On the other hand, the great comedies

very often contain passages approaching tragedy in seriousness. And when this mixture reaches something like a balance, we have what almost becomes a new genre as *tragi-comedy*. An example of this in English is Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, but perhaps a more notable illustration of the type is Molière's *Le Misanthrope*, where tragedy and comedy are so blended as to be hardly distinguishable.

Two other dramatic types which we must consider briefly are melodrama and farce. Historically, melodrama is akin to tragedy, for it developed out of serious plays. Such plays in which a number of lyrics were interspersed came to be called melodramas; that is, dramas with songs, the Greek word *melos* meaning song. Gradually plays of this kind became more and more sensational; and now, though music is frequently introduced, they are distinguished chiefly by their tendency to rely upon spectacular effects, to stress plot, and to neglect characterization. In most definitions the happy ending is included among the

essential traits of melodrama. However, Thomas Kyd's well-known tragedy of revenge, *The Spanish Tragedy*, has been termed a melodrama, though its ending is certainly not happy; and we are inclined to speak of any sensational, blood-and-thunder production as melodramatic, whatever be the nature of its ending. Of modern melodrama *The Silver King* by Sir Henry Arthur Jones affords a typical illustration. This play is thoroughly sensational, but it is interesting and offers fairly good reading.

The exaggeration and frequent disregard of probability which we find in melodrama appear likewise in farce, but farce is not serious. It is a light form of humorous drama, often satirical, in which

Farce. the comic traits of character types are exaggerated or even burlesqued and the action is filled with absurdities, often with sheer horseplay. The word *farce* comes from the Latin *farcire*, which means *to stuff* and is thus a good name for the type which it designates, because a farce is a play stuffed with absurdities and wit of a low order. Farce, nevertheless, has its place in literature; for some of the greatest comedies contain farcical passages. *The Frogs* of Aristophanes, for instance, exhibits farce in plenty, and in Shakespeare's plays we find it on all sides. Even in his high comedies such as *Twelfth Night* there are elements of farce; Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are farcical characters. And in his more boisterously comic *Merry Wives of Windsor* we have that typically farcical episode in which Falstaff, surprised while paying court to a married woman, is carried off in a basket of soiled linen and escapes, only to be dumped ignominiously into the Thames.

The grouping of plays into the traditional types which we have been investigating is useful to the student of drama, for it causes him to compare and contrast those which he sees or reads and thus helps him to a fuller appreciation of dramatic literature. Yet we must remember that these classifications are at best merely approximate and that many good plays fall outside them. Particularly in recent years the problem play and

The Problem Play and the Thesis Play.

the thesis play—a problem play in which the author takes sides—have enjoyed great popularity. All kinds of moral and social problems have been presented to us in the drama, and frequently dramatists have used the stage as a kind of forum in which to set forth their personal opinions. Many of these plays can be classified as tragedies, comedies, or tragi-comedies, but they are peculiar in that their appeal tends to be intellectual rather than emotional. In thesis plays the plot, instead of following a natural cause and effect sequence, is likely to be constructed so as to illustrate the social condition or moral situation which the dramatist is disclosing; and the characters, as Mr. Thomas A. Dickinson points out, are likely to become “personified abstractions,” or “animated mouthpieces of the author’s views.”

*We have seen that the popular conception of drama as something which has to do with what is strange, unexpected, or capable of producing a sense of shock is,*

*on the whole, not far from correct; that drama represents life through impersonation; that, despite certain modern experiments in writing static plays, action is still essential; and that the characters in drama are, as a rule, exhibited as partici-*

Summary.

*pating in struggle of some kind—outer struggle, inner struggle, or both. We have seen that dramatic dialogue is usually more brilliant than the everyday talk of real life. We have compared the drama with the novel, and observed that plays are in general shorter than novels and more compressed, and we have seen that the dramatist must use his materials more selectively than the novelist and that he has greater difficulty in revealing the thoughts of the characters and indicating the passage of time. We have observed that tragedy is serious and sad, most frequently ending unhappily for the protagonist, often written in poetry, and able usually by the aid of poetry to fill the beholder with a sense of exaltation; that comedy, on the other hand, is bright and cheerful, working almost invariably to a happy ending; that tragi-comedy combines the tragic with the comic; that melodrama is serious, but spectacular, sensational, and inclined to overemphasize plot at the expense of true characterization; and that farce is light and humorous, disposed to exaggerate action and to burlesque characters. Finally, we have noted that in recent times, because of the mixing of type characteristics, many productions which cannot easily be classified are known merely as plays; that problem plays deal with social and moral questions, and that thesis plays do the same thing, with the author taking sides and expressing his views.*

### QUESTIONS

1. In what ways can we use the expression *dramatic poetry*?
2. Can there be drama outside of literature?
3. What is the popular conception of the drama?
4. Is there any justification for this?
5. What is meant by the "appeal

of the exceptional"? 6. In what way is the conception of drama being broadened? 7. Do you think that action is a necessary trait of drama? 8. Is action characteristic of primitive drama? 9. What can you say about action in Greek drama? 10. What is meant by "static drama"? 11. In what way did Maeterlinck change his views concerning the static drama? 12. What is the gist of Brunetière's "law of the drama"? 13. What is meant by "outer struggle"? 14. What is meant by "inner struggle"? 15. What are requisites of good dramatic dialogue? 16. What is meant by "stage-illusion"? 17. In what ways does the drama differ from the novel? 18. What are the chief sub-classes in drama? 19. What can you say about the origin of tragedy? 20. To what extent does Aristotle's definition of tragedy hold true today? 21. Can tragedy any longer be distinguished by the rank of its hero? 22. What can you say about the ending in tragedy? 23. Does the language in which a tragedy is written have anything to do with the play's power to fill us with exaltation? 24. What are the essential traits of comedy? 25. What can you say about the ending in comedy? 26. What is tragi-comedy? 27. What are the characteristics of melodrama? 28. What are the characteristics of farce? 29. What is a problem play? 30. What is a thesis play?

## EXERCISES

1. Here is a striking comparison of two literary types:

"History," said Carlyle, "is a mighty drama, enacted upon the theatre of time, with suns for lamps and eternity for a background."

What essential elements of drama can be found in history? What one essential element, at least, is lacking?

2. A great drama like *Othello*, or *Hamlet*, no man can read appreciatively without finding his imagination kept upon the stretch,

without constantly proposing to himself the deepest questions as to character and motive, without feeling his emotions so heightened as to move naturally in sympathy with the poetic diction and measure of the play. But in the novel, even in the great novel, the reader finds this work mostly done for him. He needs to bring to the book only an intelligently receptive attitude of mind. Most readers would take it somewhat as an affront if their novel made any exactions upon their intellect, or required any other than a pleasantly passive mood of feeling. They take a novel as they take a beverage: it must have a pleasant taste, be easily swallowed, afford a momentary stimulation, and not require to be digested. This, by the way, is what renders the novel such an efficient medium for inculcating any sort of doctrine. The average reader doesn't expect to think while reading a novel, and doesn't think; while he is in that easy temper you may quietly go on begging the question without awakening his logic. The story is a sort of grateful anaesthetic, under the influence of which he will calmly endure almost any operation upon his intellect.<sup>21</sup>

What, according to this paragraph, are the differences between the effects of reading a great drama and reading a novel?

3. A play must have a theme; this theme must be interpreted by a story; and the story must be stiffened into a plot. The plot may be simple and straightforward, free from complications and complexities; but it must deal with a struggle. It must show the clash of contending desires. This marks the sharp difference between the novel and the play.<sup>22</sup>

What things studied in this chapter are suggested to you by the statement made in the above paragraph? Tell what you remember of each of them. Can you think of a novel which has some of the qualities here demanded of the drama?

<sup>21</sup> C. T. Winchester, *Some Principles of Literary Criticism*. New York, 1899, p. 285. By permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

<sup>22</sup> Brander Matthews, *The Principle of Playmaking*. New York (Charles Scribner's Sons), 1925, p. 40.

## CHAPTER XVI

### TYPES OF PROSE

SINCE most people find prose much easier to write than poetry, we might naturally expect works of prose to appear in literature at an earlier date than poems.

As a matter of fact, however, nearly all of the very early literary works which have survived are composed in verse. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, for example, the oldest productions of any importance in Greek literature, are poems; and *Beowulf*, which antedates all extant English prose, is the earliest sustained English epic which has come down to us. Whether poetry was actually written earlier than prose we do not know, but we do know that in most literatures any prose of literary quality which may have existed side by side with the oldest poems has perished. The explanation for this may lie in the fact that what is written in verse, the poet's medium of expression, is relatively easy to remember. Thus in remote times when stories were disseminated through oral transmission, chiefly if not entirely, those in verse had a better chance of retaining a form more or less fixed. As a result they would be more likely to be preserved.

In English, prose of the first order was late in appearing. A number of prose works—chiefly histories, chronicles, homilies, and translations—were written in the time of King Alfred, but none of them has any great literary value. Not until near the close of the four-

teenth century, when Wyclif, who has been called "the father of English prose," completed his translation of

the Bible, was any notable prose masterpiece achieved in our literature. In 1470, Sir

Thomas Malory finished his *Morte d'Arthur*, itself a significant work, but a book destined to furnish inspiration and source material not so much for subsequent writers of prose as for poets. From then on, important prose works came out in steadily increasing numbers. With the advent of the King James Version of the Bible in 1611, English prose reached a level of excellence equal to the highest which our poetry has attained. In simplicity, directness, power, and beauty, the style of the King James Version has never been surpassed, unless we make an exception of the Book of Common Prayer which antedated the Authorized Version of the Bible by a few years. However, not until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when newspapers and magazines commenced to be circulated, did prose assume a prominence in any way comparable to that which it has today. At present, though much poetry is being written, prose has to a great extent crowded it out of the drama, and in general has become the chief vehicle of literary expression. Especially in modern prose, divers types may be distinguished. Of these we have space to consider only a few—the novel, the short story, the essay, the biography, and the oration.

In the sixteenth century many collections of stories were published in England<sup>1</sup> and among the stories included were numerous translations of French and Italian

<sup>1</sup> One of the most popular of these collections was Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, from which Shakespeare gleaned material.



tales known in Italy and elsewhere as *novelle*.<sup>2</sup> From the Italian *novella*, the singular of *novelle*, our word *novel* is derived. But the word was not applied to extended stories in prose until much later. Early works of prose fiction which we should now designate as novels were called in their own day *histories*, or *memoirs*, or *romances*. Indeed, the term *romance* is still used at times with reference to long prose stories which stress incident more than character and deal primarily with love and adventure. Today, however, we are inclined ordinarily to describe a sustained story of almost any kind, if it is written in prose, as a novel.

Though the name of the novel came into our language with the introduction of the *novelle* into England in the sixteenth century, we must go back much further if we wish to find the ultimate sources of the literary type which the novel represents. Essentially novels are stories and as such are related to the earliest folk tales. The novel is the crowning achievement of the story-teller's art, of which the folk tale was the first fruit. After the simple folk tales came works of fiction, some in poetry and others in prose, which as time went on became, to a greater and greater extent, products of conscious artistry. Out of these the modern novel developed. The detailed study of these sources and of the novel's genesis falls outside the scope of this book; however, we should note in passing that there have been two principal lines of development. In one stands fiction which is primarily romantic and often idealistic; in the other, fiction which

The Term  
Novel.

Sources  
of the  
Novel.

<sup>2</sup> The word means *new things*.

is fundamentally realistic and often satiric. The medieval romances, though great numbers of them were written in verse, may be regarded as precursors of modern prose fiction. Most of them belong in the first line of development, being stories of chivalric love and knightly exploits—stories in which the members of the court circles delighted. These were followed in the sixteenth century by romances, such as Sidney's *Arcadia*, which were affiliated with the pastoral romances of Italy and Spain; in the seventeenth century by translations and imitations of the early French historical romances; in the eighteenth by the Gothic romances—tales of terror, mystery, and adventure represented by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Mrs. Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, a book which Jane Austen cleverly satirized in *Northanger Abbey*; and finally in the nineteenth century by the historical romances, or, let us say, the romantic novels of Sir Walter Scott. But side by side with the medieval romances of chivalry, there were realistic stories such as the *fabliaux* which reflected the taste of the people more than that of the court—stories which often made sport of women, the nobles, and the priests with frankness and even with brutality. From these proceeds the second line of development. They were followed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the realistic *novelle* and later by stories of adventure and roguery, such as Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle*, which were inspired by picaresque<sup>3</sup> tales imported from Spain when the *novelle* were being imported from Italy. And these were followed in turn

<sup>3</sup> The Spanish word *Picaro* from which this is derived is usually defined as "rogue."

by the realistic novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

But in the course of these developments, the two lines tended to merge and come within the province of the novel proper. Such merging is definitely exemplified in *Robinson Crusoe*, and for that reason the creation of the novel as we know it is often attributed to Defoe. More strictly speaking, we might say that the first modern novel is Richardson's *Pamela*. After this came the great fiction of Fielding and Richardson's own *Clarissa Harlowe*. In Richardson and Fielding the genre is established and in some respects already carried to its highest point of excellence. The domain of the novel may be described thus in the words of Professor Upham:

Somewhere between the extremes of heroic romance and popular *novella* lies the province of the novel. It prefers real people to an idealized royalty and presents them in a more or less realistic way. It aims at an organic unity of construction, and—with certain exceptions—has the merit of stopping when it is done. Still the plot of a novel is more comprehensive and the actual time involved is longer than in the *novella*. The novel is largely concerned with love,—neither the supreme devotion of romance nor the hard, cynical thing too common in *novelle*.<sup>4</sup>

We can see from this quotation how the novel in its developed form impresses us as fiction but must be true to life. As Mr. H. L. Mencken has well said, "The novel is concerned solely with human nature as it is practically revealed and with human experience as men actually know it." The novelist is not an historian.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred H. Upham, *The Typical Forms of English Literature*, New York, 1917, p. 150. By permission of the Oxford University Press.

"The historian," says Henry Van Dyke (who here follows Aristotle) "aims to tell what happened to certain people at a certain time. The novelist aims to tell what might have happened to people if they had lived at a certain time." The poet may lead us into a world of dreams; the novelist, in his proper function, should never lose contact with reality. His plot may be romantic, but his presentation must be realistic. Even in the eighteenth century, a time not so far removed from the extravagancies of the heroic romances as is our own, novelists saw that their business, though different from that of the historian, was to draw a true picture of life. In the preface to *Evelina*, a novel which exhibits the life and manners of the eighteenth century, Fanny Burney wrote this:

To draw characters from nature, though not from life, and to mark the manners of the times, is the attempted plan of the following letters.

She meant that her aim was to present such characters as could have lived in her day, but not to photograph people who were then actually living.

William Painter, whose *Palace of Pleasure* is the most celebrated of the collections of stories published in England in the sixteenth century, offered his translations of Italian *novelle* to English readers "to shorten," as he said, "the tedious toil of weary ways." By this quaint phrase he meant that the chief purpose of those tales was to provide entertainment. And in the opinion of many people today the furnishing of entertainment is still the chief purpose of the novel.

Faithful-  
ness to  
Life.

Entertain-  
ment.

Yet the purpose of Samuel Richardson, the veritable father of the novel, was avowedly moral. On the title page of *Pamela* we find this:

*Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, in a series of familiar letters from a beautiful young damsel to her parents, published in order to cultivate the principles of virtue and religion in the minds of the youth of both sexes; a narrative which has its foundation in truth and at the same time that it agreeably entertains by a variety of curious and affecting incidents, is entirely divested of all those images which, in too many pieces calculated for amusement only, tend to inflame the minds they should instruct.

Nor is Richardson the only English novelist who has aimed to do more than merely "shorten the tedious toil of weary ways." In much of Dickens the didactic purpose is fully apparent, though it be not proclaimed openly, and Thackeray had a moral purpose in much of his satire. In *Vanity Fair* he interrupts his characters to speak in his own person against the insincerity and sham which he found in the world of fashion, and says:

Such people there are, such people there are living and flourishing in the world—Faithless, Hopeless, Charityless; let us have at them, dear friends, with might and main. Some there are, and very successful, too, mere quacks and fools: and it was to combat and expose such as these, no doubt, that Laughter was made.<sup>5</sup>

And in very recent times novels which are to a considerable extent didactic in aim, "novels with a purpose," have been exceedingly popular.

But if we turn back to *Pamela*, we shall see that Rich-

<sup>5</sup> These are the closing sentences of Chapter VIII in *Vanity Fair*.

ardson did not overlook the importance of entertainment. He was willing to temper the moral instruction with "curious and affecting incidents" calculated to divert his readers and attract their interest. We may say, then, that *Pamela* uses entertainment as a means of conveying instruction. *Pamela* would not be a novel at all if it did no more than teach a lesson. Nor would those later works of fiction which have a moral purpose really fulfill their function as novels if they were not able to engage our attention in some pleasurable way. At least, it is safe to say that the power to give entertainment is one of the novel's essential characteristics.

The general discussion of plot, character, and setting will be reserved for the next chapter; but inasmuch as the novel proper is usually distinguished from earlier works of prose fiction not only by its greater truthfulness but also by the nature of its plot, some reference to the subject must be made here. In the *De Coverley Papers* we find skillfully drawn characters and faithful portrayal of life; but those papers do not constitute a novel, because they are not so combined as to form a plot. They have been described as representing "a novel in solution." And Defoe's stories are rather forerunners of the novel than novels proper. They are true enough to life, though not always to those aspects of life with which we are most familiar; yet the series of incidents which they narrate are not so combined that each is always the logical outcome of what has preceded—the inescapable result of a preceding cause. In novels proper the plot is different; it comes closer to satisfying the requirements set forth in this definition:

Cause and  
Effect  
in Plot.

It is the tracing of a single series of events from their causes through their various interactions to their consequences—perhaps we should not be far astray if we said the tracing of trivial and unrecognized causes to infinite and inevitable results.<sup>6</sup>

A great many novels—George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, for example—are dramatic in their plot structure, exhibiting complication or rising action, climax, and resolution or falling action. However, many others—particularly those recent novels which offer large chunks of life—tend to resemble the epic in plot. A work like Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga* is really a collection of novels which trace the fortunes of an entire family through several generations, and may present more than a "single series of events." Such a creation is almost necessarily characterized by a comparative looseness of plot construction; but it must at least have, to use the familiar phrase of Aristotle, "a beginning, middle, and end," and it must observe the law of cause and effect.

The word *novel* is another of those literary terms which are not susceptible of exact definition. The best we can do towards defining it is to say that when loosely used it denotes an extended story in prose, presenting fictitious characters that might have existed and actions that might have taken place, and presenting them in such a way as to furnish entertainment; and that when more strictly applied, it designates a story of similar kind, but one which tends to deal with such aspects of life as are familiar to us, to observe a cause and effect relation in the sequence of its

<sup>6</sup> C. F. Horne, *The Technique of the Novel*. New York (Harper and Brothers), 1908, p. 26.

plot incidents, and to produce a natural harmony between those incidents and the motives and traits of the people depicted.

English literature offers us novels of many kinds in rich array. Among them are three especially important groups. There is the novel of manners, concerned chiefly with describing the people and social characteristics of some particular period and locality. Examples are Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Frances Burney's *Evelina*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, and Howells' *The Rise of Silas Lapham*. There is the psychological novel, so called, which is occupied primarily with studying character in its development. Examples are George Eliot's *Silas Marner* and Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*. And thirdly, there is the historical novel. Examples are Scott's *Quentin Durward*, Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, and Thackeray's *Henry Esmond*.<sup>7</sup> The modern developments from these classical divisions we leave for consideration in our last chapter.

A type of fiction which today rivals the novel in pop-

<sup>7</sup> Sometimes the historical novel shows us a fictitious hero and a fictitious heroine, both mere lay figures created for the sake of the love story, and at the same time some real historical personage as the dominant figure in the book. In *Quentin Durward*, for instance, both Quentin and the Lady Isabelle are mere stock characters of romance. The dominant figure is Louis XI of France. At other times the fictitious hero may be dominant, while the historical characters pass in and out among the pages of the story. In *Henry Esmond* we have treatment of this kind and in Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*. Some other kinds are the "doctrinaire novel" represented by books like Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* and Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, the biographical novel represented by Miss Waddell's *Peter Abelard*, and what has been called the genealogical novel represented by Galsworthy's *Forsyte Saga*.



ularity is the short story. The modern short story is in many ways affiliated with the novel; yet it is a distinct type. Its ancestry may be traced back through the *novelle* and other stories contemporary with them to the *fabliaux* and other tales in prose and verse which were current in the Middle Ages, and indeed ultimately to primitive folk tales. Those works of prose fiction which we today are accustomed to term short stories are, however, in most cases very different from the majority, at least, of the tales which preceded them, and it is frequently asserted that Edgar Allan Poe is primarily responsible for the difference—that he originated the short story proper. With this view the late Professor Stuart P. Sherman took issue. He says:

Americans who are sensitive to the assertion that America has originated nothing in literature point to Edgar Allan Poe as the originator of the short story. In the ordinary sense of the word, of course he is nothing of the sort. The origin of the short story is lost in the unhistorical morning of human society. Not to speak of the ancient tales of Rome, Greece, Arabia, India, we know that there were numberless fine short stories in English and other modern tongues hundreds of years before Poe was born. The mystery of narrative effectiveness was not unknown to the nameless authors of the English and Scottish popular ballads. Before the end of the fourteenth century Chaucer had made a book of short stories, the *Canterbury Tales*, quite as vivid, various, and artful as this of ours.<sup>8</sup> Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, a prose collection of the Elizabethan Age, contained sufficient of

<sup>8</sup> Professor Sherman here has reference to *A Book of Short Stories* published by Henry Holt and Company, New York, which he edited, and from the introduction to which this passage is taken.

"human interest" and dramatic situation to furnish plots for Shakespeare and a generation of great dramatists. And so we might proceed to show that short stories in prose or verse of more or less merit have appeared in every age. Is it a question of the origination of the "modern" short story? Poe himself declared in 1842 that "we are far behind our progenitors in this department of literature," and pointed to the earlier numbers of *Blackwood's* and to British magazines in general for superior examples conforming to his own standards.

But perhaps Professor Sherman detracts a little too much from Poe's honor. No one will deny that many tales, stories that were short but were not short stories in the modern sense, existed before Poe's day. These can be left out of the reckoning. And if short stories proper likewise existed, the fact remains that Poe was still in a way the originator of the modern short story, because, as Professor Sherman admits, he defined the type, and because, in defining it and in furnishing examples which were able to attract wide attention and serve as models, he gave impetus to the immense production of short stories which has continued steadily since his time.

In a book of this kind we cannot study the technique of the short story in detail; we can, however, quote Poe's celebrated pronouncement on the subject, and in the light of what he says enumerate a few of the characteristics which distinguish the short story as a literary type. In *Graham's Magazine* for May, 1842, Poe published a review of Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*. In this review he gave his idea of what the tale, as he called it, or of what the short story, as we now say, should be:

Poe's  
Influence.

A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents,—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one preestablished design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel.

In this statement Poe insists that the true short story must show economy in the use of words and have the power to produce a unified impression. Elsewhere he has maintained that it should be original, that it should be of such length as can be perused in one sitting, and that its plot should move without deviation towards a predetermined goal. The mention of originality is perhaps superfluous, since this quality must be exhibited by all writings which are to endure. "If a would-be creative artist has no individuality that we can detect," says Professor Kittredge, "we set him down as conventional, and that is an end of him and of his works." But the other requirements are pertinent. The comparative brevity of the short story helps to set it apart from the novel; its economy in using words and the ruthlessly undeviating progress of its plot set it apart from most of the earlier

Character-  
istics of the  
Short Story.

tales, for those tales usually tended to wander, though often to wander delightfully. But economy in words, brevity, and the straight-line advance of the plot are really subsidiary to the main requirement, which is the production of a unified effect.

On the whole, Poe was faithful to his theory. We find it exemplified everywhere in his stories, but nowhere more successfully than by "The Cask of Amontillado." From the opening paragraph, which gives the reasons for the hero's desire for revenge, to the last scene in the catacombs, where we see his purpose effected, nothing appears to distract the mind from the single impression the author meant to convey. The story is brief, economical, straightforward, and unified.

Whatever may have been the position of Poe as an originator, there can be no doubt about Montaigne's place in the history of a form of composition which, in length at least, is ordinarily, though not always, related to the full-fashioned treatise somewhat as the short story is to the novel. When the first two books of the *Essais* appeared, in 1580, a new genre was born.

By using the title *Essais*, which in English would be "Attempts," Montaigne meant that his compositions, rambling discourses on various subjects written from the author's personal experience of life, were experiments in a new field of literature. To Francis Bacon also, whose little book came out not long after Montaigne's, the term meant an attempt, but rather in the sense of a first trial in attacking a subject. That explains why his essays, however packed with thought they may be, strike us rather as carefully drafted preliminary notes than

Original  
Meaning  
of the  
Term  
*Essay*.

as fully expanded treatises. Today essays are no longer looked upon as experiments; nevertheless they still, in their two main varieties, show kinship with the "attempts" respectively of Montaigne and of Bacon. The two varieties which we have in mind may be designated the familiar and the formal, between which would range the intermediary types approaching, as the case might be, one or the other extreme.

The familiar essay has been called the "lyric of prose," because it starts, as does the lyric, with a personal impulse—something which happens to suggest a thought to the author—and continues with a train of imaginative and emotional reflections. Our interest is likely to be more in the relation of the author to his theme than in the theme itself. We see this process exemplified in Charles Lamb. His "Old China" develops out of a chance conversation over the strange figures on a set of blue chinaware, if we may believe what the essay itself states. Lamb calls the figures *speciosa miracula*:

I was pointing out to my cousin last evening, over our Hyson, (which we are old-fashioned enough to drink unmixed still of an afternoon), some of these *speciosa miracula* upon a set of extraordinary old blue china (a recent purchase) which we were now for the first time using; and could not help remarking, how favorable circumstances had been to us of late years, that we could afford to please the eye sometimes with trifles of this sort—when a passing sentiment seemed to overshadow the brows of my companion. I am quick at detecting these summer clouds in Bridget.

"I wish the good old times would come again," she said, "when we were not so rich."

And then Lamb rambles on with pleasant reminiscences about "the good old times." The subject is trivial and so is the treatment; yet there is whimsical imagination, and there is wistful emotion. In every way the essay is lyrical in tone.

Far less familiar, but still sufficiently subjective to be likened, let us say, to the didactic lyric, is Huxley's essay, "A Liberal Education." Here the theme is thor-

**The Inter-  
mediary  
Type.** oughly serious, and we meet with no discursive revelation of the writer's moods and fancies; yet the composition all through bears the note of personal appeal. There is a kind of subjectivity about it which may be illustrated by the famous passage comparing life to a game of chess:

Suppose it were perfectly certain that the life and fortune of every one of us would, one day or other, depend upon his winning or losing a game at chess. Don't you think that we should all consider it to be a primary duty to learn at least the names and moves of the pieces; to have a notion of a gambit, and a keen eye for all the means of giving and getting out of check? Do you not think that we should look with a disapprobation amounting to scorn, upon the father who allowed his son, or the state which allowed its members, to grow up without knowing a pawn from a knight?

Yet it is a very plain and elementary truth that the life, the fortune, and the happiness of every one of us, and, more or less, of those who are connected with us, do depend upon our knowing something of the rules of a game infinitely more difficult and complicated than chess. It is a game which has been played for untold ages, every man and woman of us being one of the two players in a game of his or her own.

The chess-board is the world, the pieces are the phenomena of the universe, the rules of the game are what we call the laws of Nature. The player on the other side is hidden from us. We know that his play is always fair, just and patient. But also we know, to our cost, that he never overlooks a mistake, or makes the smallest allowance for ignorance. To the man who plays well, the highest stakes are paid, with that sort of overflowing generosity with which the strong shows delight in strength. And one who plays ill is checkmated—without haste, but without remorse. . . .

Well, what I mean by Education is learning the rules of this mighty game. In other words, education is the instruction of the intellect in the laws of Nature, under which name I include not merely things and their forces, but men and their ways; and the fashioning of the affections and of the will into an earnest and loving desire to move in harmony with those laws.<sup>9</sup>

Furthest removed from the familiar stands the formal essay of the historical or philosophical or critical type. Often essays of this kind start out as book re-views, but in most cases the writer soon turns away from the book and proceeds to sketch out his own ideas on the subject in question. Thus the book may be regarded as the initial impulse, just as Lamb's conversation with Bridget gave rise to "Old China," an essay selected as typical of the extremely familiar brand. Indeed we can nearly always find an initial impulse of some sort in the most formally constructed essays, and this characteristic development out of a primary suggestion is one of the things that bring them within the class we are now con-

The  
Formal  
Essay.

<sup>9</sup> See Thomas Henry Huxley, *Lay Sermons, Addresses and Reviews*. New York (D. Appleton-Century Company), 1871, p. 31.

sidering. Another trait which marks them out is the fact that, however the conduct of the argument may seem to be governed by the subject-matter, they are written more or less from the author's personal point of view. All this is nicely illustrated by Macaulay's *Warren Hastings*. The book which here gave the initial impulse was the Rev. G. R. Craig's *Memoirs of the Life of Warren Hastings, first Governor-General of Bengal*. Macaulay opens his essay with these illuminating words:

We are inclined to think that we shall best meet the wishes of our readers, if, instead of minutely examining this book, we attempt to give, in a way necessarily hasty and imperfect, our own view of the life and character of Mr. Hastings.

From this introduction on, Macaulay presents his discussion objectively and in a formal manner, but, as he has premised, quite from his own point of view. Nowhere in the essay is this personal coloring of an objective treatment shown more clearly than in the paragraph which begins the final estimation of one whom against all calumny he is concerned to extol:

With all his faults,—and they were neither few nor small,—only one cemetery was worthy to contain his remains. In that temple of silence and reconciliation where the enmities of twenty generations lie buried, in the Great Abbey which has during many ages afforded a quiet resting place to those whose minds and bodies have been shattered by the contentions of the Great Hall, the dust of the illustrious accused should have mingled with the dust of the illustrious accusers. This was not to be. Yet the place of interment was not ill-chosen. Behind the chancel of the parish church of Daylesford, in earth which already held the bones of many chiefs



of the house of Hastings, was laid the coffin of the greatest man who had ever borne that ancient and widely extended name. On that very spot, probably, fourscore years before, the little Warren, meanly clad and scantily fed, had played with the children of the ploughmen. Even then his young mind had revolved plans which might be called romantic. Yet, however romantic, it is not likely that they had been so strange as the truth. Not only had the poor orphan retrieved the fallen fortunes of his line, not only had he repurchased the old lands, and rebuilt the old dwelling. He had preserved and extended an empire. He had founded a polity. He had administered government and war with more than the capacity of Richelieu. He had patronized learning with the judicious liberality of Cosmo. He had been attacked by the most formidable combination of enemies that ever sought the destruction of a single victim; and over that combination, after a struggle of ten years, he had triumphed. He had at length gone down to his grave in the fullness of age, in peace, after so many troubles, in honor, after so much obloquy.

The essay has flourished in England since the time of Bacon, but it did not assume great prominence until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless,

**Importance of the Essay.** despite its comparatively late advent, it has become an important type in English literature, and its importance is rather increasing.

Among the writers whose works in this kind are already regarded as classics are Dryden, Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin, Huxley, Pater, and Stevenson; and among Americans we may name Emerson and Lowell. Contemporary essayists of distinction are so numerous that we cannot attempt to give even a representative list of them here. The student who wishes to gain quickly a pre-

liminary acquaintance with a large number of great masters of prose may well turn to the perusal of this branch of literature, for essays generally are short enough to be read at one sitting.

Another type of prose which in recent times has been steadily gaining in importance is biography. The term *biography*, as its etymology implies, means "the written history of a person's life." By the ancients  
 The Biography. biography was considered a department of history, and ancient biographers usually treated the lives of celebrated people as historical illustrations of moral truths. The modern conception of biography is different. Today we look upon it as a separate type, and we think of a biography as a faithful record of some person's experiences in life. In English literature the writing of biographies began late. A few appeared in the reign of Henry VII. Sir Thomas More wrote a life of the Italian philosopher, Pico della Mirandola, William Roper wrote a life of Sir Thomas More, and there were others; but comparatively few biographies were written before the seventeenth century. Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* was published in 1579, and was popular enough to go through eight or more editions in the next hundred years. It gave Shakespeare material for some of his plots, but unfortunately it did not stimulate the writing of new biographies enough to give us a contemporary life of Shakespeare. Notable among seventeenth-century biographies is Izaak Walton's *Life of Donne*, and among those of the eighteenth century, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, usually considered the greatest biography in English, if not the greatest ever written in

any language. The nineteenth century produced such standard biographies as Southey's *Life of Nelson*, Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, and Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay*. Today biographies are being written in great numbers and are rivaling novels in popularity.

A good biography should not idealize its subject, nor should it make him out to be worse than he was. Many early biographies of great Americans are too eulogistic.

Requisites  
of Good  
Biography.

On the other hand, many more recent biographies of our national heroes—particularly the “debunking biographies”—in their effort to obliterate every trace of idealization, drag into the light and overemphasize anything of a derogatory nature which can possibly be found. Again, it is dangerous business for the biographer to attempt a picture of the whole age in which the subject lived. When he does, the man whose life is written, or the woman, is likely to become lost in his “times”—the central figure is likely to become obscured by the background. Finally, the writer's personal prejudices should not be allowed to distort the picture he is presenting. A good example of biography distorted by prejudice is Griswold's “Memoir” of Poe. It took years to correct the false impression created by this sketch.

The older theory of biography was to sketch the subject from the outside. Of late years, however, biographers, led by the portentous development of modern psychology, have been attempting to break into the innermost recesses of the minds and hearts of their subjects. Recent biographies often make deep studies of the subject's sub-conscious mind and attempt thus to reveal hidden mo-

The New  
Biographies.

tives. This method is exemplified in Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*. It is a pseudo-scientific method, and, on the whole, is dangerous because the data from which the biographer is to make his inferences can seldom be trustworthy. And, as Mr. Crothers says, biography is not a science:

Biography cannot be reduced to a science, but it may rise into the finest of the arts. It is the art of reproducing not merely the incidents of a great man's life but the impressions he made on those who knew him best.<sup>10</sup>

When a biography is the story of a person's life written by the person himself, it is called an autobiography.

The Auto- When Huxley gave his reasons for writing  
biography. an account of his own life, he made an excellent apology for writing autobiographies in general:

At present, the most convinced believer in the aphorism "Bene qui latuit, bene vixit," is not always able to act up to it. An importunate person informs him that his portrait is about to be published and will be accompanied by a biography which the importunate person proposes to write. The sufferer knows what that means; either he undertakes to revise the "biography" or he does not. In the former case, he makes himself responsible; in the latter, he allows the publication of a mass of more or less fulsome inaccuracies for which he will be held responsible by those who are familiar with the prevalent art of self-advertisement. On the whole, it may be better to get over the "burlesque of being employed in this manner" and do the thing himself.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel McChord Crothers, "Satan Among the Biographers," *Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1923.

It was by reflections of this kind that, some years ago, I was led to write and permit the publication of the subjoined sketch.

On the other hand, it may be argued against Huxley that the writer of an autobiography may not be able to "see himself as others see him." However, all who read Huxley's delightful and modest "subjoined sketch" will be glad that it was written. And whatever the merits or faults of the type may be, literature would be much the loser, if such great autobiographies as those of Saint Augustine, Benvenuto Cellini, Rousseau, Edward Gibbon, and Benjamin Franklin did not exist.

Letters might be regarded as an involuntary sort of autobiography in which the author gradually reveals himself and the circumstances of his life to friends, ordinarily not with the intention of publication. In English, it would suffice to mention the names of Cowper, Gray, Walpole, Byron, and Edward FitzGerald.

The Oration. In the oration we find a type of prose which has come down to us from antiquity with its characteristic traits little changed. The Greek orations of Demosthenes and the Latin orations of Cicero differ little in their typical traits from modern oratory, if they differ at all. The oration is an "elaborate and formal discourse" intended for delivery on some special occasion. It may be an argument designed to win people over to one side of an important public question. Representative of this kind of oration is Burke's *Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies*. Or it may be a formal eulogy presented on some special

occasion in memory of a great event or in honor of the illustrious dead. Of such kind is Webster's *First Bunker Hill Oration*. Or it may deal with some other subject. For example, Washington's *Farewell Address* is, as its title states, a speech of farewell to the American people, delivered when Washington went out of office. The style of the oration will vary according to the occasion, but it must be suited to oral presentation and is likely to be somewhat more rhetorical than ordinary prose style. Although Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* is not sufficiently elaborate to fit in well with the usual definitions of the oration, it illustrates the other traits of the type and is short enough to be quoted in full:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war; testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, or long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take in-

creased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

It is a notable fact that in such orators as Burke, trained to address the ear as well as the eye, certain qualities of prose style attain the highest pitch of excellence. This is peculiarly true of pulpit oratory and, paradoxical as it may sound, of theological controversy. For English in the grand manner, combining eloquence with idiomatic vigor, better models would be hard to find than Richard Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, Isaac Barrow, and J. H. Newman. The pity is that, for obvious reasons, the chief sermonic and ecclesiastical writers are so generally neglected in the study of literature. They, rather than the novelists and even more than the essayists, have exploited the full riches of the language and are in the great tradition.

*We have seen that in the development of literature, poetry, as a rule, comes before prose, and that English prose of the first order was late in appearing. We have seen that the chief types of prose literature are the novel, the short story, the essay, the biography, and the oration. And we have seen that the novel is a fictitious narrative of considerable length, and capable of arousing interest—a narrative exhibiting such characters as might have existed in real life, and recounting, in the cause and effect sequence of plot, such events as might actually have occurred; that the short story,*

Pulpit  
Oratory.

Summary.

*likewise narrative fiction, is characterized by brevity, compression, economy, directness of plot, and power to give a unified impression; that the essay is a composition, usually short enough to be read in one sitting, in which the author discusses a topic subjectively or from his personal point of view; that the biography is the story of some person's life, which becomes autobiography if the person in question is also the author; and that the oration is an elaborate formal discourse.*

## QUESTIONS

1. Are the oldest works of literature usually written in prose or in verse? 2. What can you say about the development of literary English prose? 3. What may be considered the chief types of prose? 4. How did the word *novel* originate? What were the sources of the novel? 5. What were the two chief lines of development followed by the English novel? 6. To whom has the creation of the novel been attributed? 7. Who is looked upon as the first novelist in the modern sense? 8. What are the essential traits of the true novel? 9. Is it the chief purpose of the novel to provide entertainment? 10. What kind of relation between the incidents described is essential to a plot in the modern sense? 11. Why have the *De Coverley Papers* been called a "novel in solution"? 12. What are some of the sub-classes into which novels may be divided? 13. What was Poe's place in the genesis of the short story? 14. How did Poe define what we call the short story? 15. What do you consider the most important characteristic of the short story? 16. What was the original meaning of the term *essay*? 17. Why has the "familiar essay" been called the "lyric of prose"? 18. In what respects does the formal essay differ from the familiar essay? 19. What traits in general distin-



guish the essay? 20. What particular advantages are to be derived from reading essays? 21. What is a biography? 22. What qualities are necessary to a good biography? 23. What tendencies have been shown by recent biographies? 24. In what way are letters related to the biography? 25. What is an oration? 26. What are some of the characteristics of the oration? 27. What can you say about pulpit oratory?

### EXERCISES

#### 1. Read this statement carefully:

When a story is put into metrical form by a skilful poet, it becomes more or less crystallized and has a good chance of being preserved. In fact the result is somewhat similar to that of committing it to writing. Stories which are not put into poetic form are more liable to become obscured and forgotten.<sup>11</sup>

If what this paragraph states is true, what explanation can we give for the priority of poetry?

2. A chapter of first-rate fiction arrests the attention at every turn. It provokes interest, awakens curiosity, challenges comparison with one's own experience, and even while it is energizing the imagination, concentrates it. Poetry touches us at a higher level, it is true, provided that it touches us at all. Poetry is a finer art than fiction, but for that very reason there are many readers who cannot come under the domination of poetry. They have no natural ear for its music, and at twenty or twenty-two they find themselves or think themselves too old to learn the notes.<sup>12</sup>

What comparison is drawn here between prose fiction and poetry? Summarize in your own words the ideas here expressed.

<sup>11</sup> H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age*. Cambridge (The Cambridge University Press), 1912, p. 110.

<sup>12</sup> Bliss Perry, *A Study of Prose Fiction*. Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1903, p. 21.

3. Amidst these finished and perfect writings [Swift's], a new kind makes its appearance, suited to the public tendencies and circumstances of the time, the anti-romantic novel, the work and the reading of positive minds, observers and moralists, not intended to exalt and amuse the imagination, like the novels of Spain and the Middle Ages, not to reproduce or embellish conversation, like the novels of France and the seventeenth century, but to depict real life; to describe characters, to suggest plans of conduct, and judge motives of action.<sup>13</sup>

Does this paragraph bring back to you any of the things we have noted about the novel? If so, enumerate them.

<sup>13</sup> H. A. Taine, *History of English Literature*. New York (Hurst and Company), p. 456.

## CHAPTER XVII

### PLOT, CHARACTER, AND SETTING

SINCE the question of plot, character, and setting is of basic importance in the study of some literary types and comes up frequently in the study of several, we have not attempted to deal with it wherever it arose, but have reserved it for discussion in a concluding chapter.

The distinction between plot and character is one of the fundamental points of literary criticism. It shows itself primarily in the drama, but it shows itself also in

The Dis-  
tinction Be-  
tween Plot,  
Character,  
and Setting. all the other forms. Though setting is often important, it is, on the whole, subsidiary. Historically, this distinction appears in the Aristotelian theory set forth in the *Poetics* that action is essential in drama, and in the modern theory that character is essential. With Aristotle the story is of first importance; according to the modern idea it is the medium for expressing character. Aristotle's preoccupation with the drama is explained by the fact that the novel in the modern sense did not exist in his time. Of plot and character in the tragic drama, he says:

Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as sub-

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subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all.<sup>1</sup>

The opposite, or modern, point of view, which stresses the importance of character at the expense of action, has thus been set forth by William Archer:

Action ought to exist for the sake of character: when the relation is reversed, the play may be an ingenious toy, but scarcely a vital work of art.<sup>2</sup>

The difference between the two extremes may be illustrated by contrasting the *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles with Shakespeare's *King Lear*. In the *Oedipus* the hero unwittingly kills his father and marries his mother. The horror in the play is aroused by the act itself as ruinous to the family, society, and human life, not because of the character of the man who commits the acts, but because he is the unwitting medium of acts horrible and abnormal in themselves.<sup>3</sup> In *Lear* the king, owing to certain traits peculiar to his character, mistakes the true feelings of his daughter, Cordelia, and in anger disowns and disinherits her. All the tragic events thus flow from the character of the man. The acts are used to set forth the rashness and violence of the man.

For the student of literature, a point of interest is to

<sup>1</sup> S. H. Butcher, *The Poetics of Aristotle*. London (The Macmillan Company), 1911, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> William Archer, *Playmaking*. New York (Dodd, Mead and Company), 1928, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps a distinction might be made between the use of such themes in classical and in contemporary literature. In Sophocles, the horror is associated with fear and pity because the tragic acts are subversive of human nature. In contemporary poets like Robinson Jeffers and novelists like William Faulkner, similar themes of incest and rape are used. But the resultant effect is rather horror without fear and pity, since such acts are rather regarded as normal to human nature.

see how different schools and different individuals manipulate plot in different ways. Whether plot is an

end in itself, or is used as a means to indicate character, its importance is evident.

Types  
of Plot.

Dealing now with the modern use, we can see that plot takes different forms. (In drama of the Shakespearean type we have five acts and a five-part plot, though the divisions of the plot do not coincide with the acts. In tragedy there is the exposition or introduction, the rising action, the climax, the falling action, and the conclusion. The exposition makes the general situation clear; the rising action presents a chain of related events which lead up to the climax; the climax shows us a sudden reversal in the fortunes of the protagonist; the falling action exhibits a series of related occurrences which follow from the climax; and the catastrophe shows the conclusion, which involves the defeat and usually the death of the hero. A good illustration is afforded by the plot of *Julius Caesar*. From the beginning up to Cassius's soliloquy at the end of the second scene in Act I, Shakespeare gives us an explanation of the conditions out of which the tragedy develops. In the soliloquy we learn Cassius's plans for entangling Brutus in the conspiracy; and from that point up to the second scene in Act III, we follow the plot through a rising action. So far, all has gone well for Brutus. In his address to the mob after the assassination, he seems successful in winning the populace to his side. The rising action, then, has disclosed all the events leading up to Brutus's speech. But Antony's speech, which immediately follows, brings about a decisive change in the attitude of the mob. This marks the climax, for

thenceforth everything goes against Brutus. From the climax to the third scene of Act V, we have the falling action. In this scene Cassius kills himself, and there the catastrophe begins. In typical Shakespearean comedy the plot development is similar except that the fortunes of the hero decline to some turning point, and then come up. Thus the ending is happy. At the climax of *The Merchant of Venice*, a tragi-comedy, Shylock's purpose is thwarted and Antonio is saved when Portia says:

Tarry a little; there is something else.  
 This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood;  
 The words expressly are "a pound of flesh."  
 Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh;  
 But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed  
 One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods  
 Are, by the laws of Venice, confiscate  
 Unto the state of Venice.

Sometimes in drama we have plots of the Ibsen type, often called "fifth-act" plots. In these the dramatist puts upon the stage only the events which would normally have occurred in the fifth act had he developed his story according to the usual Shakespearean scheme. For example, the action in Ibsen's *The Master Builder* begins near the end of the story. The important events which preceded—the burning of the old home, the death of the two little boys, and the building of the church at Lysanger—are cleverly revealed through the dialogue. When a dramatist uses the "fifth-act" plot, he can more easily conform to the requirements of the "classical unities." He can at least bring the occur-

rences actually represented into a space of twenty-four hours, and he can avoid shifting the scene of the action from place to place. It is interesting to note here that in *The Tempest* Shakespeare was experimenting in the direction of the Ibsen plot. When the play opens, we are already on the island. All the early part of the story is disclosed through dialogue. And even when Shakespeare is closely following the five-part method of development, he is inclined to plunge into the action somewhat after the manner of the epic plot rather than to open with extended exposition.

In the epic we see ordinarily the form of plot in which the author, though he does not begin near the end of his story, plunges *in medias res*. The plot of the *Odyssey* is typical. Homer begins in the middle of his tale. Not until we reach the ninth book do we learn of the early adventures of the hero—those which took place between the departure from Troy and the arrival in Ogygia. This part Odysseus himself recounts, "telling," as Professor Palmer says, "a traveler's tale which fills four breathless books with marvels."

In the novel we see both schemes followed—the dramatic and the epic. In following the dramatic, the novelist usually approximates the five-act plan. He does not, of course, mark the five divisions so exactly, and in most cases he does not reveal the climax so definitely; but, in general, his plot shows a similar rise and fall. Sometimes, on the other hand, he follows the epic type, and often he combines elements of both schemes. George Eliot's *Silas Marner* illustrates the third plan. The author plunges *in medias res*, for when the book

opens, Silas has already moved to Raveloe. On the whole, however, the dramatic method is followed. The explanation of Silas's former experiences in Lantern Yard occurs in the very first chapter and takes up only a small part of the story. From then on, the plot is dramatic, though there is a fall and rise rather than a rise and fall, because the novel ends happily. The position of the climax is apparent; the turn of affairs comes with the arrival of Eppie.

In all three of these types we see a phenomenon, the reason for which, at first sight, is not easy to understand—the intermingling of the main plot with the sub-plot. The reasons for adding the sub-plot are various. In a general way we may reduce them to three: (1) the need to get sufficient length; (2) enhancement of interest by complication; and (3) relief of tension, particularly when the main plot is somber. In drama we can see these three purposes combined in *The Merchant of Venice*, with the resultant effect of tragi-comedy. Here the bond plot has first importance. The casket plot and the Jessica-Lorenzo plot are both subsidiary, but each of them helps to give the play length, to increase its interest by complication, and to furnish relief. Besides, the Jessica-Lorenzo plot, which contains the elopement of Shylock's daughter and her marriage to a hated Christian, heightens the tragedy of Shylock. In the epic we can see the same three purposes combined in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. The title indicates that the main plot is the love of Orlando for Angelica, which has its tragic element in driving Orlando to madness. The sub-plots are so

Plot and  
Sub-plot.



numerous as to make the epic almost a conglomeration of plots rather than plot and sub-plot. They perform all three functions in the novel. An excellent illustration is Trollope's *Last Chronicle of Barset*, which is, despite its faults, one of the greatest pieces of fiction in the language. The main story is that of a clergyman, Mr. Crawley, who, half maddened by the hard circumstances of his life, uses a certain sum of money innocently but in such a manner as to lay himself open to the charge of theft. The sub-plot deals with the rather comic adventures of a minor character in London. Evidently Trollope, in this sub-plot, was aiming at complication of interest and relief, but unfortunately, as often happens, the sub-plot, while giving length and relief, rather detracts from the effect of the whole.

In all three of these literary genres, drama, epic and novel, we are in the realm of fiction, the characters being, to some extent at least, the invention of the author. One necessity laid upon the writer of fiction would be that his plot and the characters engaged should seem real; the technical term for this, coming down straight from Aristotle, is probability. The point is that the author must so manipulate plot and character as to make the story strike the reader as plausible. The story need not be real in the sense that it has actually happened but must have the air of probability, as if it might have happened. Probability is thus closely associated with the factor of illusion, in which the reader or spectator co-operates with the author; the author introduces the element of probability; the reader or spectator adds the element of illusive reality. This is an essential element of true art of all kinds. We can

see it illustrated eminently in the examples of epic and fiction already used in connection with the plot.

Plot primarily is a grouping of events in their natural sequences. We have seen the reasons for adding the complications of sub-plot, although the common means of maintaining and enhancing interest, which in the mere sequences of events might flag, are "foreshadowing," "suspense," and "recognition." The term "foreshadowing"

Fore-  
shadowing,  
Suspense,  
and Recog-  
nition.

pretty well explains itself. It means that early in the drama or the narrative, we have the hint of some event or tragedy which is to befall the characters, though it is as yet unforeseen by the characters themselves. In this way the reader's or spectator's mind is kept in a state of suspense to see whether the foreshadowed event will actually occur, and, if so, how it will come about. The classical example of foreshadowing and suspense is the *Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles. Oedipus at the first is ignorant of the fact that he has killed his father and married his mother. From the beginning, the mind of the spectator is kept in suspense to see whether the foreshadowed revelation of these acts will be fulfilled and the anticipated horror will become a reality. In the case of recognition, the suspense is of a somewhat different character. Here the relation between two characters or the identity of a particular character is known to the reader or spectator but unknown to the characters themselves. The suspense consists in the uncertainty whether the characters will become aware of what the spectator already knows. It is foreseen that the whole denouement of the plot will turn on this possible or probable recognition. Shakespeare several times

used this means with great effect as in the *Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*.

In modern literature, plot, as we have seen, is employed for its own sake as interesting, but is frequently subordinated to characterization. There are at the disposal of the writer other means for effecting characterization, some of which enter into the structure of the plot, while others are added more or less extraneously. The revelation of character by what a person does belongs to plot, though it may extend beyond the structural sequence of events. Closely connected with the plot would be what a character says in connection with what happens; but very often the author puts into the mouth of a character words which would not be uttered in the drama of life, but which are clearly intended as a revelation of the inner workings of the character's mind. This is the explanation of those soliloquies which seem to interrupt the course of the action. A further extension of this means of characterization would be a frank and open comment of the author himself about the people of his story. This means, of course, is not practicable in the drama. For the same purpose, however, we often see the dramatist putting into the mouth of one of his characters comments which in the novel he would make himself.

In the novel, the author has a further instrument at his command in the setting of his plot. In such a story as Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, the first chapter, describing Egdon Heath and the ancient memories it evokes, is not only what might be called drama in description, but gives the key to all the events that are to

follow and the profounder traits of the characters involved. The dramatic conflict is produced by the marriage of the hero and the heroine, one of whom is romantically attracted to the heath and all it means, while the other is violently repelled by everything it means and by its dominance over their lives.

*Our study of plot, character, and setting has shown us that in the ancient classical drama plot had chief importance, but that in modern drama the exposition of character is, as a rule, the primary aim. We have seen that there are three principal kinds of plot: the five-part plot, composed of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and catastrophe; the fifth-act plot, usually found in the drama, in which the author presents what occurs near the end of his story and uses dialogue to reveal what has preceded; and the epic plot, in which the narrator commences towards the middle of the action. We have found that sub-plots are employed to lengthen the tale, to increase the interest by complication, and to afford relief. We have noted that the writer must make the plot seem plausible and the characters seem real. We have seen that foreshadowing, suspense, and recognition are closely related, and that all three help arouse interest. We have seen that characterization may be effected by what the character does, by what he says, and by comments of the author. And we have taken into account the value of setting.*

## QUESTIONS

1. What was the classical conception of the relative importance of plot and character?
2. What is the prevalent

modern conception? 3. What are the three chief types of plot? 4. How do they differ? 5. What are the purposes of sub-plots? 6. What is meant by "probability"? 7. What is meant by "foreshadowing"? 8. What is meant by "suspense"? 9. What is meant by "recognition"? 10. What are some of the chief methods of characterization? 11. In what novels and short stories that you have read is setting of marked importance?

### EXERCISES

I. A distinguished German critic says this:

An action, in itself, is not dramatic. Passionate feeling, in itself, is not dramatic. Not the presentation of a passion for itself, but of a passion which leads to action is the business of dramatic art; not the presentation of an event for itself, but for its effect on a human soul is the dramatist's mission. The exposition of passionate emotions as such, is in the province of the lyric poet; the depicting of thrilling events is the task of the epic poet.<sup>4</sup>

Does this conform to the classical view that plot is more important, or to the modern view that character is more important? Summarize the material of the paragraph in your own words.

2. Repeatedly in treating plausibility it has been implied that what is said or done must be "in character." This suggests another test of good motivation. What happens must be plausible, not only in that it accords with human experience, but with what has been done by the character in preceding portions of the play.<sup>5</sup>

Can you think of a case in which a writer has failed to make "what happens" accord with "human experience"?

<sup>4</sup> E. Freytag, *Technique of the Drama*, translated by E. J. MacEwan. Chicago (Scott, Foresman and Company), 1904, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> G. P. Baker, *Dramatic Technique*. Boston (Houghton Mifflin Company), 1917, p. 264.

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Can you think of a case in which what a character does is not in accord with his preceding acts? However, could such inconsistency not sometimes be "in character"? How?

3. From plays and novels which you have read illustrate "foreshadowing," "suspense," and "recognition."

4. Show how sub-plots in some novel or play you have read lengthen the story, arouse interest by complication, and furnish relief.

5. Illustrate from your reading the methods of characterization mentioned in this chapter.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SOME MODERN TENDENCIES

BEFORE concluding our study of English literature, we should consider briefly a few modern tendencies. Any comprehensive discussion of what is now going on in the field of letters or of the new problems Influences. with which literary criticism must cope to-day would require a book in itself, and time alone can determine the true significance of contemporary trends.<sup>1</sup> However, we can at least note the influence of John Donne on recent poetry and the influence of that movement, or series of movements, derived ultimately from Whitman, Henry James, and Poe, which, though most active in France, has affected modern poetry and prose fiction elsewhere.

<sup>1</sup> In the period from, let us say, 1914 to 1920 the critics were vigorously debating for and against the free verse writers and the imagists, who were then flourishing. Now those writers are, to use an expression of the modernists, already becoming "outmoded." Nevertheless, they have left some meritorious work and have done service in discouraging the use of worn-out poetic imagery. Today the group of poets, of whom Mr. W. H. Auden is the best known, is attracting a good deal of attention, but most of their admirers will admit that they have not yet fully found themselves. What will result from their experiments no one at present can safely predict.

Selections from modern and even contemporary poetry, both English and American, can be found in many good recent anthologies. Those primarily interested in American literature will find selections from such poets as Edwin Arlington Robinson, Ezra Pound, John Gould Fletcher, Edgar Lee Masters, Amy Lowell, Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Robert Frost, Archibald MacLeish, T. S. Eliot, and Robinson Jeffers, as well as brief biographies and criticisms, in J. H. Nelson, *Contemporary Trends*, the last volume in *American Literature Since 1914*. New York (The Macmillan Company), 1933. Some of these are not contemporary, but all are modern.

Poets of late have awakened to a vivid realization of the fact that Donne was something more than a writer of fantastic conceits, such as his famed comparison of two lovers' souls to "stiff twin compasses." The Influence of Donne. Donne found the materials for his lyrics not so much in the external world around him as in his own mental experiences. Mr. T. S. Eliot has pointed out that there is a fundamental difference between the poetry of those who have been called the "Metaphysicals," of whom Donne was the chief, and the poetry in the tradition of Milton. The one kind he calls "intellectual," the other "reflective." "Tennyson and Browning," says Mr. Eliot, "are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thoughts as immediately as the colour of a rose. A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility."<sup>2</sup> This being the case, it may well be that the influence of Donne on our modern poets will, to some extent, prove beneficial; for the attainment of power to transmute more varied and intricate thought experiences into emotion may widen the range of poetry and make poetry better able to reflect the complexities of modern life.

But we observe other tendencies of which the value is open to question. Many are pushing the use of symbolism—the attempt to suggest thoughts and emotions by words denoting things concrete—to such an extreme that they are in danger of defeating the true purpose of all literature—the conveyance of some intelligible

<sup>2</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*. New York (Harcourt, Brace and Company), p. 247. For a good study of the Metaphysical Poets, see also the introductory essay by Professor J. C. Grierson in *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford University Press).



thought, feeling, or mood from one person to another. Mr. John Sparrow, in his *Sense and Poetry*, calls attention to the phrase of Miss Edith Sitwell's, "Emily-colored hands." To understand this we must first discover that the writer once had a nurse named Emily whose hands were large and red. Having obtained this information, we may feel that the phrase is striking and effective; but how many of us have the time or opportunity to acquire so minute a knowledge of an author's life? And when, as is not infrequently true, a poet carries the use of even intelligible symbolism to extremes, the reading of his works becomes too much like an exercise in translation. The fault lies not with symbolism, but

Symbolism.      with its abuse. All genuine art is, in some measure, symbolic; but the wild vagaries of cubism and similar fads are symbolistic without being works of art at all. The same thing is true of poetry.

Besides, the modern abuse of symbolism goes even further. In normal symbolism the association of ideas is not haphazard, but in the extreme form it is. The extremists associate ideas just as they come without choice or reflection. Extreme symbolism dissolves the changing phenomena of the external world into images of fluctuations in the poet's own soul. In this Whitman was a forerunner. In his "Song of Myself" we see him setting two things over against each other—his absolute Ego and all about it the objective world which consists of a flowing stream of impressions having in themselves no distinction of values.

From such symbolism the new movement progresses to *surréalisme*, or super-realism, which admittedly is derived from Poe, Whitman, and Henry James. The

super-realists, in their own manifesto, have set forth their aim—"a psychical automatism by which one proposes to express, whether orally or by writing or in any other manner, the real functioning of thought as a spontaneous dictation, in the absence of any control exercised by reason and apart from any preoccupation whether aesthetic or ethical." Here thought ceases to be a logical association of ideas. In other words, reason and purpose are put aside, and the poet, lulled into a dream state, simply writes down any impressions, related or unrelated, which chance to flow into his consciousness. Whether the chaotic transcript of impressions which must necessarily result from this method of production is poetry or has any value as a record of life, the individual reader may decide for himself.

In prose fiction, as we shall see presently, the chief origin of modern tendencies was Henry James. If we examine the various distinctions and categories we have been making—plot, characterization, setting, and the rest—we shall discover behind them all two factors at work in shaping the writer's method. On the one hand, there is observation, what the author sees, on the other hand there is reflection, what he thinks and feels about it; the outer and the inner; the objective and the subjective; representation and interpretation.

The problem of art, in the largest sense of the word, is to get these two factors into co-operation, to balance them properly, by the devices we have enumerated; and for each of the larger forms of literature this problem has its peculiar difficulties.

Super-  
realism.

Tendencies  
in Modern  
Prose  
Fiction.

Thus in the drama, at one end of the scale, we have representation at its highest. The dramatist brings on the stage men and women acting and speaking for themselves, while he himself must remain behind the scenes and say nothing. He is there all the while, and through his plot and characters is giving an interpretation of life. Pure representation, or realism, even if it were possible, would not be art; and from Aeschylus to Ibsen, and from Ibsen to O'Neill, we can see that the dramatist is interpreting as well as representing. It is a different world that each of these dramatists presents, because each of them thinks and feels differently about what he sees. His problem is to find the means to express himself without destroying the illusion of pure objectivity demanded by the stage. The chorus in the Greek play is the most transparent of these devices.

At the other end of the literary scale is the frankly reflective, descriptive, meditative, interpretative poem such as Wordsworth's *Prelude* and *Excursion*. Here the difficulty is to hold the reader's attention, and it was the lack of dramatic representation that elicited Jeffrey's famous criticism of the *Excursion*: "This will never do."

Perhaps the nature of the difficulties can be seen most clearly in prose fiction and in the methods of meeting them adopted by various writers from Defoe to James Joyce. The purely objective novel of incident and event, if such there can be, may entertain, but will not greatly impress us.

To be literature the tale must combine representation and interpretation: it must interest by its objective dramatic scenes that seem to be from actual life; it must

in one way or another be giving significance to a sectional view of life and telling us what it all means. But how shall this union be effected?

The easiest, and perhaps the commonest, method is that of simple juxtaposition or alternation. The author makes no bones about it, but interrupts his narrative at will to insert his own reflections about what is happening and his own attitude of like or dislike towards his characters; now he is hidden behind the stage on which his puppets are acting, and now he steps forward to tell us what it all means. This is eminently the method of Thackeray and Trollope, and cannot be condemned out of hand; indeed it may in the end be regarded as the best means of all. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that there is something mechanical about it, and in weaker hands the author's too open intrusion of himself may become offensive.

In the autobiographical novel there is an attempt to evade these objections by uniting author and protagonist in one person. *Henry Esmond* is perhaps the masterpiece in this kind, and we can see in it how Thackeray through the mouth of his hero is interpreting his story while himself out of sight, and all the while is dramatizing this interpretation, so to speak, into part of the story. An illustration simpler to analyze is *Robinson Crusoe*, which is often ranked as the first true novel ever produced. Here we have a tale of strange improbable adventures, which will interest the reader if only they can be made credible. Defoe accomplishes this by making the hero tell his own story, with a wealth of details which only he could know and which have the veracity of an eyewitness. He further lends verisimilitude to

these adventures by threading them together on a single thesis; they are all the work of Providence. To dwell on such a thesis at great length might turn the novel into a sermon or moral discourse, and in a measure Defoe does not escape this misadventure; but he does mitigate it by placing his interpretation in the mouth of the hero himself as the reflections that would naturally occur to such a person under such circumstances. But this method introduces very obvious difficulties of another sort. The narrative must be restricted to what the author-protagonist himself does or sees done. The disadvantages of such a restriction are so great that various and sometimes very awkward devices are adopted to extend the hero's knowledge to what has occurred in his absence.

Another form is the correspondence novel which might be described as a group of autobiographies brought together by some dramatic relationship. Here each character tells his own story in letters which quite naturally combine narration and comment. This is a device which has been pretty generally rejected by modern writers, and the objections to it are obvious. For one thing a letter to be natural will contain a large amount of trivial matter, and a story told by cross correspondence runs the risk of dragging interminably. Furthermore, the hero and heroine may be placed in situations where the mechanical difficulties of writing and dispatching lengthy epistles is almost insurmountable, as we see in Richardson's novels. Nevertheless, the genre, in the hands of a master, as indeed we see in this same Richardson, is capable of intense dramatic effect.

Perhaps for a student of literature the most interest-

ing note of modernism is the way in which our writers of fiction have become aware of the problem confronting them and are experimenting with various devices to overcome the difficulties. In general we may say that these experiments are moving in three directions. One of these is by going deeper into the naturalism illustrated by Zola, and brutalizing it to such an extent that the very shock to the nerves will stun the reader into thinking that the spectacle of these horrors—chiefly incest, rape, and hideous death—is opening to him the very inner significance, the very heart, indeed the very whole, of human life. Among the living authors in this school one of the most conspicuous today is William Faulkner.

But such brutalized realism is really a surrender of art for clinical pathology; it is a passing phase of exasperated nerves. More interesting and significant are the two distinct and divergent tendencies in the one direction towards action, representation, in the form of psychological drama, in the other direction towards what has become known technically as "the stream of consciousness." And it is a notable fact that both of these movements, as modern practitioners are beginning to see and acknowledge, go back for their immediate origin to Henry James, and to his art of separating out the thought and will and emotion of a character and personifying them, or hypostatizing them, so to speak, as active entities.

James himself was aiming at dramatic effect and had no thought, apparently, of the other direction his influence might take.

Percy Lubbock, in his study *The Craft of Fiction*,

has analyzed the purpose and method of James so acutely that we may quote from him at length:

In the book [*The Ambassadors*] as it is, Strether personally has nothing to do with the impression that is made by the mazy career of his imagination, he has no hand in the effect it produces. It speaks for itself, it spreads over the scene and colors the world just as it did for Strether. It is immediately in the foreground, and the "seeing eye" to which it is presented is not his, but the reader's own. . . . The author does not tell the story of Strether's mind; he makes it tell itself, he dramatizes it. . . . And so the novelist passes on towards drama, gets behind the narrator, and represents the mind of the narrator as in itself a kind of action. . . . I conclude that on this paradox the art of dramatizing the picture of somebody's experience . . . touches its limit. There is indeed no further for it to go.<sup>3</sup>

The theme of the novel here analyzed by Mr. Lubbock is perfectly simple. Strether, the hero, is sent over as an ambassador to Paris from America to rescue a young man from the enticements of life in that gay capital. He brings with him the narrow prejudices of his home. He starts on his mission, but finds himself gradually influenced by his new surroundings and begins to wonder whether the life of the young man with its finer artistic perceptions and its liberated imagination is not better and more human than that to which he should be recalled. There is thus a conflict in Strether's mind between his Puritan prejudices and the enticement of this larger life. James, as Mr. Lubbock has expressed it, dramatizes this conflict by sep-

<sup>3</sup> Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*. New York (Peter Smith), pp. 146, 147, 148, 171.

arating the prejudices and the enticement from the person and representing them as themselves actors, so to speak, on the stage of Strether's mind, and as interpreters of what is happening. They make the scenic world and expound its meaning.

In the subtlety of James's art this process of dramatizing fiction, in a manner that unites representation and interpretation, can go no further. But Mr. Lubbock also sees that, curious and interesting as this art may be as art, it rather defeats itself in the end. In method such a novel approaches as near to actual drama as possible; but in effect it is very undramatic, missing the power of drama to stir the stronger emotions and awaken the deeper activity of the imagination. So it is that Dickens by much clumsier methods and by a form of art the very reverse of the drama is more dramatic than James.

As for the other direction of modernistic art, the so-called stream of consciousness, it is easy to see how this springs from the same source. In James the thoughts and emotions of a character are detached and represented as entities engaged in action, but they still are used as symbols of the drama in which the person of the story is engaged, the character of that person is itself not dissolved into its constituents. Now carry this process a step further, think of these thoughts and sensations and fancies not as *flowing from* a particular mind or as indicating a central character, but as entirely dissociated from any controlling will and as *flowing through* a mind by a kind of hypnotic suggestion, one following another by a bare mechanical "association of ideas," to use the old psychological term; then you will



have not the dramatized novel but a dissolution of drama in the stream of consciousness. That this, the most modernistic form of fiction, is derived from James is a fact known and acknowledged. "Henry James," writes Gertrude Stein, "for whom she [Miss Stein herself] now has a very great admiration and whom she considers quite definitely as her forerunner."<sup>4</sup> The same relationship is admitted by James Joyce, who is the recognized master of this new "art of the future."

It is the purpose of this book to study and describe the various elements that enter into the making of literature, not to pass judgment upon them. Least of all is there any intention of prophesying over what good or ill may come out of this double influence of Henry James who, more than any one other creative writer, started the modern movements on their course. But it may not be out of place to close with a passage from H. G. Wells, as cited by Professor (now Governor) Wilbur Cross in his study of *The Modern English Novel*:

His [James's] people nose out suspicions, hint by hint, link by link. Have you ever known living human beings do that? The thing his novel is *about* is always there. It is like a church but without a congregation to distract you, with every light and line focussed on the high altar. And on the altar very reverently placed, intensely there, is a dead kitten, an egg-shell, a bit of string.<sup>5</sup>

The lesson of it all would seem to be that great art depends not primarily upon theory or method or artistic

<sup>4</sup> *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. New York (Harcourt, Brace and Company), 1933, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> New Haven (The Yale University Press), 1928, p. 21.

conscience, however important all these may be, but upon the artist's intense preoccupation with life in its largeness and depth and truth.

### QUESTIONS

1. What is particularly characteristic of John Donne's poetry? 2. What good effect may result from the influence of Donne on modern poets? 3. Why is it dangerous to carry symbolism too far? 4. What is the avowed purpose of surrealism? 5. What two factors do we find at work jointly in fiction, shaping the writer's method? 6. In what literary genre do we find representation at its highest? 7. In what genre do we find interpretation at its highest? 8. Is it difficult to attain a proper balance of the two factors? 9. Where do we find the difficulty best exemplified? 10. What is the easiest and commonest method of combining representation and interpretation? 11. What is the difficulty with the method? 12. Are these difficulties evaded in the autobiographical novel? 13. What is the chief defect of the autobiographical novel? 14. What is the difficulty with the correspondence novel? 15. Are modern writers of fiction aware of the difficulty? 16. In what three directions are they moving? 17. Of the three courses which modern fiction is taking, which two have the greater significance? 18. From what novelist are both of these tendencies derived? 19. What was his method? How does this method tend to defeat itself in the end? 20. How does the use of the "stream of consciousness" in fiction develop out of this method?

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